University Sermons

The Gift *of* Influence

BY

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INTRODUCTORY

One of the sermons in this volume was preached at Mansfield College, Oxford, and two at Scottish universities; the rest were preached during the last two years at many of the American universities and colleges. My own seminary sets me free for some months each year of express purpose to visit the universities, and I appreciate the great privilege so freely offered me of entering somewhat into the college life of America. The open-mindedness which is so attractive a feature of American life is also characteristic of the universities, and whatever be the special religious colour of each, I have had the same cordial invitation and generous welcome from all. These sermons were delivered as university preacher at some of the older universities, such as Yale and Harvard and Princeton, and at some of the smaller colleges, like Williams and Amherst, and also at some of the newer universities, and even at some of the State universities, which, though they do not have the office of university preacher, make other provision. Four of the sermons are in pairs, which were

given on successive Sundays, one pair at the University of Chicago and the other at Cornell University.

The sermons generally were not chosen for their academic character, but were expressly designed to avoid scholastic issues. It is my experience that the last thing an academic audience at public worship wants is an academic discourse, partly because students have a surfeit of that in their ordinary studies, and partly because a college congregation, after all, consists very largely of young men who are not much more than beginning their education, and whose problems are the practical problems of all youth. More than guidance in speculation, do they need simply inspiration for life. At many colleges where opportunity offered, in addition to the regular chapel service I met the men later in a less formal way, and we discussed the intellectual and speculative bearings of religion, often in the form of questions supplied by the students.

Superficial observers sometimes speak of the materialism of America. Nothing could be further from the truth, when we look deeply and broadly. It might even be said with far more truth that America suffers in every region of life from an unregulated idealism. Certainly no one can know intimately the mass of students without being struck by

the ready response they give to every high thought and every generous passion. No one can despair of the future who knows the splendid material the colleges of the land contain, and how eagerly men long to attempt great tasks. If anything, the practical and ethical interests overmatch the intellectual. In religion the social side bulks largest, and this because of the new ideals of social service, which is only another way of stating the demands of the Kingdom of Heaven. Men are anxious to know how best to invest their lives, and never before was there such keen desire to find a place to serve. It is the most hopeful thing in our situation that our educational institutions are supplying men with large and noble ideals of social duty.

I

THE GIFT OF INFLUENCE

The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it.—GENESIS xxxix. 22.

JOSEPH, as depicted in the beautiful Biblical narrative, was a born leader. His sweet and gracious nature with its brightness and alertness gave him easy access to men's hearts. He was naturally lovable. His personal comeliness for one thing prepossessed everybody in his favour; for he was "a goodly person and well-favoured." Then he was of a gentle and affectionate disposition, which delighted in giving people pleasure and in serving them. He had also early learned in the school of affliction, which only made his heart more tender and considerate of others. He was a man of principle, too, conscientious, trustworthy, willing to suffer rather than commit a base or dishonourable act; and in the long run character counts for much and makes men instinctively trust the man of tried probity. His supreme qualification was that he had an inner life

of simple faith, which kept him from personal anxiety about his own future and left him free to think of others.

There was in him in addition the unusual combination of the imaginative and the practical. The young man who dreamed dreams and saw visions was also a man of affairs with remarkable talent for business, efficient in managing all he undertook. The gift of vision always attracts, compelling men by the force of a bold spirit, but the dreamer who can inspire to action is not always able to direct the force he sets in motion. He is often impractical and unbusinesslike. The born leader of men must have something of both qualities, the power of the dreamer of appealing to sentiment and creating enthusiasm, bringing a glimpse of the ideal to his more prosaic followers; and at the same time he must prove his capacity and create confidence in his practical wisdom. Joseph showed he possessed both sets of qualities in all the varied situations in which he was placed. The young slave, who rose to be overseer in the house of his master, when he sank to be a prisoner impressed all there with his character and with his capacity, so that the keeper of the prison trusted him, and all the inmates readily assented to his personal superiority, till he took his

natural place as leader, so that "whatsoever the prisoners did there, he was the doer of it." The prisoner became the real governor. He was the inspiring force, bringing light and hope and accomplishing more by his influence over others than was possible by any individual exertion.

This is the way all leadership works. It is the power to do this which constitutes leadership. No man can do a great work single-handed. He must work with, and through, others. He must have friends and comrades of some sort, or at least instruments; and the highest kind of leadership is that which makes all its instruments into friends, working together for a common end, comrades in a common cause. This peculiar magnetic power of a great leader makes his followers associate themselves utterly with his fortunes, so that his triumphs become theirs, and his ambitions write themselves on their minds. They will serve and obey and gladly sacrifice that his ends may be advanced. It is said of Napoleon in his best days that before a battle on which much depended he summoned his officers into his tent one by one, grasped their hand and looked right into their eyes without a word; and they went out all Napoleons, ready to die for him if need be.

It is one of the noblest things in human nature that men give such pure devotion to an admired and loved leader, that they are hero-worshippers, though sometimes the hero is very poor clay at the best. In truth the world waits for leaders in every branch of thought and activity, waits for men whom it can follow with a whole heart, whether or not we believe with Carlyle that universal history, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the history of the great men who have worked here. We may think more of the mass and less of the individual than Carlyle did; we may think that the followers have more to do with the making of their leaders than the leader has in shaping events; but it remains true that every generation stands in dire need of men of light and leading, men who can thrill and inspire and direct and move their fellows to high thoughts and noble passions.

Even for practical success in every great enterprise there is a clamant need of leadership. The best designs and the best organizations will come to little without some inspiring head. Every great work needs a controlling brain and heart, a centre for affection and devotion. If this be a-missing it is like the skeleton without the vital spark to make it live. If this be a-missing, even though all else be

there, the best results are impossible. In every sphere we are ready to welcome the commanding influence, if only the pre-eminence be justified by qualities that warrant it. We even content ourselves with sham leaders when no better are forthcoming; and Carlyle is right when he insists that the sole problem is to find out the true heaven-born leaders, to select the real heroes if such are to be had at all. In religion, and politics, and social service, even in business, we need the inspiring influence of leaders. We are all natural hero-worshippers. There is plenty of raw material for all the world's highest needs, plenty of humble eager souls who could be fired with zeal and devotion. A cry of our hearts is to be taken and held and drilled and *sent*. Even in Pharaoh's prison men bent to the fascination of a man like Joseph, who could direct them and lead them, so that, whatsoever the prisoners did, he was the doer of it. It is the dream of youth to be some day swept into the circle of which a true and great man is the centre, to do his bidding gladly, to move to any mission at his request, proud to serve in some great cause.

> Shine on us all in armour, thou Achilles,
> Make our hearts dance to thy resounding tread.

The history of the world may not be what it has

been called, merely the biography of great men; but at any rate the history of the world would be different if the influence of even a few of its great men had been left out. Sometimes a whole epoch has been dominated by one man, who has made history because he was able to move men by the impulse of his mind and soul. We sometimes think we can explain a great man by our common phrase, that he was the creature of his time; and there is usually much truth in the use of the phrase. The leader gets as well as gives. He cannot be put in a separate category as a thing apart, as if he were a peculiar creation, unrelated to the past and independent of the present. No man could affect his age if he were not in the fullest sense the fruit of the age, entering into its thought, knowing its problems, feeling the pulse of its life. The great world-movements do not owe their origin to one man's thought, like Minerva sprung full-grown from the brain of Jove. They grow from the needs of the time, the slowly gathering vital forces that will find outlet. The Reformation, for example, was greater than the reformers, greater than Luther or Calvin or Knox. In its political aspect it was the breaking of bonds in Western Europe that had become intolerable. In its inner aspect it was the movement of the soul of

man towards liberty of mind and conscience, towards a fuller knowledge, a truer faith, a purer worship. But the acknowledged truth of all this gives us no warrant for imagining that we have explained the great man by calling him the creature of his time. If he brought no free and individual force to the situation it would only be where it was. Granted that the Reformation would have been without Luther, there would need to be some other sort of Luther somewhere else, or, if you prefer it, some score of pigmy Luthers to do his work. There could be no Reformation without at least some kind of reformers.

It is a foolish way to treat history as if it were in a vacuum, the whirl of impersonal forces without father or mother or any definite human connection. We have got so scientific to-day with our tendencies and streams of influence and movements of thought, though it is not easy to see how there can be spiritual tendencies without spiritual beings, and moral influence without moral life, and movements of thought without thinkers. As if there were in the world man but not men, the generic man without the individual! It is of a piece with so many arguments of political economists about human life in terms of x and y, and their talk of the masses, as if the masses

were not composed of units, each with his own heart's bitterness and his heart's joy. We play with words when we talk of tendencies and movements, as if we were really accounting for anything by the use of words like these; and our preference of such general terms to acknowledging the creative influence of individuals is part of the latent infidelity which dislikes to admit creation in any sphere, the launching of a force straight from the hand and the heart of God.

We say also in similar strain that the occasion makes the man; and the truth of that is evident. But all life, every day, is an occasion; and many an occasion has arisen in history, great enough to be called a crisis, but the man was not forthcoming, to the great loss of the occasion! Sometimes rather the man makes the occasion, comes with his new message of truth, his new vision of good, his fresh inspiration of duty; and it is his coming which is the occasion. If a generation has any distinctive character at all, it is and must be the fruit of personal character. To treat the world of man without reference to the power of personal influence is to make it inexplicable. Joseph was the key of whatsoever the prisoners did; for he was the doer of it. The lines the Reformation took cannot be under-

stood unless you understand something of Luther. History is impossible without biography; and some history is an enigma to us because we cannot learn the source of the hidden unseen power at its heart, the inspiration that gave life to the deeds.

After all, the subtle magnetic force of a great man is only a common fact of life and experience, seen on a larger scale than usual. It is only a striking illustration of the common fact of influence, where height answers height, and soul catches fire from soul. It is, or may be, the gift of all in some measure; and is not merely the privilege of the few. Indeed the most potent influences in the world are not always the most obtrusive. In a region like this we cannot judge by the eye. The doer of it all in the Egyptian prison was a very obscure person at the time. The men and things that make the biggest splash in the world are sometimes the least important. It is not always the man you praise who does the real work. The scheme for which the cabinet minister gets credit is often the doing of an unknown permanent official. There is usually somewhere a man behind the throne of more importance than the man on the throne. How often the real source of even a great man's strength is derived from some humble and winsome soul who

shrinks from notice, and who could not believe that whatsoever is done he is the real doer of it. You never can tell how even a word of comfort and courage will nerve another for a task which otherwise would be left undone. Who can say what of the great deeds of the world and the noble lives of men have been inspired by one who was unregarded by dull eyes and unpraised by blatant voices?

Take the common sphere of a mother's influence. How many men will admit that all the good in them they owed to the example or teaching or memory of their mother, and whatsoever of good they have done, she was the doer of it? The young man who goes out like a knight of old to fight in the battle of life, with his armour girt on him by a mother's hand, may not have even the largest share in the glory of the conquest. There is no end to spiritual influence; and you cannot always put the finger on the place where it begins. The way of the spirit is the way of the wind. Thou canst not tell whither it bloweth nor whence it cometh.

There is none so bereft of power, so barren of opportunity, that he may not serve in this great confederacy of good. There is none who may not share in the burden and the glory of the Kingdom of

Heaven. It cometh not with observation; and not a thought or an effort or a prayer is lost, not a kindly deed or a gentle word is spent for nought. The patience of the sufferer, the faith of the lowly, the prayers of the saints, the love of loving hearts, the ministry of kindly hands, are as incense swung from the censers of the angels. You do not know when you touch the spiritual forces that surround life. In seeming inaction even, you may be the doer of whatsoever is done.

This sacred gift of influence which is yours—what are you doing with it? Are you wasting it on selfish ends, or hiding it in a napkin? If you have no consecration in your life, you are losing your best gift, you are losing your soul—and the souls of others. In the great Temple of human lives, what matter who puts on the cope-stone, and the gleaming pinnacle? What matter who does the work, and gets the credit, so that the work is done? If you consecrate yourself to God, you will get your place, and wield your influence. What higher work is there than to help another to a clearer vision of truth, or to a nobler sense of duty, to encourage in good and inspire to high ends?

II

THE FAILURE OF GOD

Howbeit I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness.—JEREMIAH xliv. 4.

THERE is a timid anæmic religion which is afraid to speak of God except in vague general terms, such as the Absolute, the First Cause, the Power that makes for righteousness, and the like. It is afraid to ascribe to God the emotional and moral qualities familiar to us in human nature, love, fear, jealousy, passion, eager desire. This is partly due to a worthy feeling, which dreads to degrade the divine by too close association with human attributes. Figures of speech, which speak of God performing acts like a man, sound offensive to superfine ears. This type of religion would worship God as the Infinite, or the Eternal, or as Absolute Law; and takes care to avoid the anthropomorphism which frankly attributes human qualities to God, by invariably using ethereal and colourless ideas. It is shocked by such

an idea as ascribing jealousy to God, or by such a figure as here, which pictures God rising early in the morning that He might lose no time in sending prophets and messengers to the people He loved in the eager desire for their good. It will have nothing but abstruse philosophical words to express spiritual things, and as a religious result it ends in expressing nothing; for it whittles away any real notion of God at all, and soon is submerged in a vague Pantheism.

Religiously it is a failure; for mere philosophical terms, however accurate, can never touch the hearts of men and inspire either true love or true worship. There is no irreverence in the way Scriptural writers ascribe to God thoughts and feelings and actions derived from human life. If God is to be real to us at all, a living personal Being, we are compelled to speak of Him in terms of the human. All language that we can use to express the divine attributes must necessarily be imperfect. We can have no conception of what we have no experience. We are forced by the limitations of our nature to think of God in human terms. Revelation also must do the same, or it would pass over our heads without effect. The Bible declares God to be infinite above thought or speech or imagination of man, with ways

and thoughts higher than man's as the Heaven is higher than the earth. But it takes the highest that we know in man, love, generosity, mercy, justice, righteousness, and extends them, and declares that God is that and more, infinitely all that, the highest and best in man. We have said that this is a necessity both philosophically and religiously; and therefore it is absurd to boggle at figures of speech which are designed to make vivid and real some aspect of these divine qualities.

From a literary point of view also such superfine criticism is stupid. It is pedantry of the worst sort to condemn the prophets for depicting God as jealously anxious for His people, or as pleading passionately with them, rising early and sending messengers beseeching them for their good, and yet failing in achieving His heart-felt desire. If God is love and is the living God, then these figures of speech are truer than any metaphysical subtleties to express the divine nature could possibly be. It was true insight, therefore, as well as moral boldness, that made the writers of the Bible fearlessly speak of God in the language of human nature, even the language of human passion. Again and again, for example, Jeremiah uses this same homely figure of speech as of a man rising early in his eagerness,

despatching messengers, leaving no means untried to bring His people to a right mind, pleading with them, and yet failing in His benign purpose as a man fails. It is a figure of the everlasting patience of God, refusing to be tired out, bearing and forbearing, trying new plans and new agents, and yet beaten back by invincible obstinacy, His best schemes frustrated, His kindest designs defeated, having at the last to acknowledge Himself baffled. "I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness."

It is a vivid picture of the failure of God. From the philosophical point of view where God is the Absolute, eternal irrefragable Law, His purpose can never be said to fail; the immutable word cannot return void but must accomplish that which it will. And in a logical system of doctrine, of which there is none so logical and consistent as Calvinism, the Sovereignty of God must be maintained, with radiance undimmed and supremacy unchallenged. His decrees go out and inevitably achieve their purpose, unerring as natural law. But there is another sense, true to the highest attributes of the divine nature,

in which God may be said to fail often, to attempt what ends only in disaster. The Bible is a record of the failures of God, the putting forth of divine grace with no result, the travail of heart and soul with no fruit. Whenever we speak of His designs in terms of love, when we think of Him as the gracious Lord or Heavenly Father, dealing with disobedient vassals or with wilful children, we are brought face to face with this strange mystery, that the Lord of lords and King of kings can fail of His purpose and be unable to attain what He most desires. The Bible constantly depicts God as putting forth to the utmost His redemptive grace, seeking ever to find an opening to the heart of man, trying every shift that wisdom and love can suggest, putting Himself on the level of men, pleading with them, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate," rising early and sending His servants, asking for obedience and reasonable service; and yet every effort repulsed, His grace made of none effect, beaten back by the obstinate defence of man. It is failure so complete that the terrible words could be said, "It repented the Lord that He had made man."

This is the heart-breaking pathos of the wonderful literature of the Bible, the failure of all the gracious means designed by perfect love, not merely

that so much of the world lay in darkness though the light shone, not merely that so little impact was made, and even is still made, on the great mass of men outside; but even with God's own people, His covenanted folk, chosen of express purpose to know His will and to carry out His design, even there what failure? The whole history of revelation reads like an extension of this pitiful figure of our text, detailing the steps taken, the different efforts made, of which this is but the summing up, "I sent unto you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness." Is not that the plain and simple impression left on us by the whole story of God's dealing with Israel, the tragedy of unrequited love, the failure of repeated attempts to establish permanent relations of devotion and service?

It is our Lord's own interpretation of that history of revelation with Israel given so graphically in the parable of the Vineyard, planted with care, hedged round with love, enriched with winepress, protected with tower, and let out to husbandmen. What more could be done to the vineyard than had been done? It was to be expected that when the

time of fruit drew near and He sent His servants to the husbandmen, that He would receive of the fruit. This is our Lord's solemn pronouncement on the history of Israel—"The husbandmen took his servants and beat one and killed another and stoned another. Again he sent other servants more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son they said among themselves, This is the heir; come let us kill him and let us seize on the inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him." It is the same figure of the Lord rising early and sending His servants, making continual allowance, patiently persisting in His effort, hoping against hope. It is the same figure also of ultimate failure, a failure more disastrous, more irretrievable, because the very last resource has been tried and again has failed. "Last of all He sent His own son." What more now could love suggest that love has not done?

To see how essentially true is Jeremiah's moving picture of God's eagerness and God's failure, we need only think of that scene in the last week of the Saviour's passion when He mourned over the holy city with yearning pitiful love, "O Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings—and ye would not." They would not listen; they would not respond; they would not obey; they would not be saved. Is there any failure in all the world like the failure of God?

Now this great solemn fact of the failure of God on which we have been insisting is really no failure on His part, because the possibility of it is involved in the very nature of the case. It is essential to moral life, which means the life of beings capable of falling, capable of rebellion, open to sin. Moral law cannot from the very constitution of moral law be classed with natural law, which has unerring sway and cannot be broken. But in the realm of morals such inevitable compulsion is impossible. Moral and spiritual freedom is a necessity of the case. Only by self-determination of the will, only by free choice of man, can God gain the victory. If men will not hearken and will not incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, if they will not submit their heart to the obedience of Christ, then though God send His servants rising early and sending them with everlasting patience and resourceful love,

pleading, beseeching, the great purpose of religion cannot be accomplished. God cannot succeed, if man fails. So that, if we consider rightly, it is not the failure of God after all which we have been lamenting, but the failure of man. And the ultimate issue of it is not merely evil against God, but as the prophet puts it great evil against your own souls. The failure is yours—and the penalty. The divine grace can accomplish anything, can overcome every obstacle, till it comes down to the bed-rock of human will; and then, if it fails, it is the failure not of God but of man. Human will is an ultimate in religion and in life. It cannot be evaded; and before the great benign purpose of religion can be accomplished the citadel of the will must be captured, and that can only be by willing submission by which the will is conformed to the will of God.

So the failure of God is the failure of man. Also, if this pathetic figure of Jeremiah which depicts God as so eager to win man that He is as an Overlord who rises early and continues late devising expedients, sending servants with never a break in the benevolent chain, giving them pleading messages to deliver—if this figure represents the facts, what wilful inexcusable failure is ours? Does not the figure fairly represent the fact? We have seen it

to be so in the long record of Biblical history; and if we appeal to our own hearts to sustain that sad verdict, do not our hearts condemn us? If we have failed to understand and to fulfil the law of God which is the law also of our own life, if we have failed to enter into the filial relationship with God, if we are living only as the beasts that perish with dull ears that never respond to the higher call and fat hearts that never move to the divine impulse, it is not for want of opportunity (be magnanimous enough to bear God witness), it is not for lack of messengers—He has sent them all, rising early and sending them, one by one, pleading with burning words, Oh do not this abominable thing that I hate, Turn ye; why will ye die: Hear and your soul shall live. The world has been vocal with the call of God if we would but hear, and ablaze with signs of God, if we would but see. By silence and by sound, by mystery and by revelation, by providence and by grace, by holy days and holy places and holy men, love has clambered at our hearts, knocked at the door till deathless love itself has almost died of hopelessness—at sundry times and diverse manners, if by any chance one might succeed where others fail, He has spoken by the prophets, rising early and sending them.

Last of all, He sent His own Son, standing beside us, touching us with human hands, calling us with human voice. By the blood and the tears and the passion and the cross—and "ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." If the failure of God is mystery, the failure of man is tragedy.

III

RIGHTEOUS OVERMUCH

Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?—Ecclesiastes vii. 16.

Our text is characteristic of one of the lines of thought which run through this strange Book. The Book is autobiographical in the true sense, that it gives a record of personal thought and experience. The Book is the fruit of the contact of a Jew with alien philosophy and civilisation. There is ever the echo of the great world outside Jewry. The author had seen the world, and had tried the different ways of life which have ever been possible for men. Brought up in the strict training of his race, he had escaped from what appeared its narrowness; he had seen the cities and the ways of men, and had become cosmopolitan. He had wealth, which opened all doors to him of education and culture and social enjoyment.

The Book is full of world-weariness. The satiety

which comes from such a life seems at first to have destroyed all serious earnest purpose; and he pronounced upon all things the verdict of vanity, that everything was equally worthless, and nothing counted much anyway. It is the judgment of a man who had seen everything, done everything, enjoyed everything, tried all the pleasures and experiences within his reach, and over all he sighs failure, vanity, and vexation of spirit. The early zest for life was soon blunted. Pleasures no longer pleased. The heart was satiated to sickness. He had set out to know life, as many young men mean by knowing life, and life had broken him and held him in its toils.

He had not given himself altogether to lower pleasures. He had tried literature, knowledge, philosophy, the higher and more intellectual delights. He had tried to find out a satisfactory philosophy of life, but here too is the same vanity. Truth seems ever to elude him. And ever and again he comes back with longing to the faith of his childhood, with its inexorable moral law, with the fear of God as the one only worthy aim of life. The Book is not a systematic treatise. It is the record of all these conflicting experiences and influences. All these different threads mingle in the yarn, and we cannot separate them completely. But the withered world-

weary life, so frankly revealed in this Autobiography, is itself the most terrible sermon that could be preached from the Book, of the vanity of a life lived apart from God.

The words of our text, with their doctrine of moderation, suggest a common thought in Greek philosophy. A warning against excess was usual even in the Epicurean philosophy, as excess would inevitably ruin the end aimed at, happiness. Moderation in everything, the golden mean, was a watchword. Avoid extremes, do nothing in excess, be prudent in pleasures, in nothing be violent and intemperate—this is the surest way to be happy. But quite apart from the question of happiness and pleasure, in typical Greek thinking the good, or virtue, or moral excellence lay in avoiding extremes. It might be called the very central thought of Aristotle's Ethics that virtue is moderation, not of course meaning moderation in indulging in anything wrong, but that wrong itself means either excess or deficiency. He defines virtue as a habit or trained faculty of choice, the characteristic of which lies in observing the mean. "And it is a moderation, firstly, inasmuch as it comes in the middle or mean between two vices, one on the side of excess, the other on the side of defect; and secondly, inasmuch

as, while these vices fall short of, or exceed, the due measure in feeling and in action, it finds and chooses the mean or moderate amount." How true this is as a principle of ethics can easily be seen. Take the matter of giving money, virtue or moderation would be liberality; the two corresponding vices would be excess, which is prodigality, and deficiency, which is meanness. Even in details of life like pleasant amusing conversation, Aristotle would call moderation wit or humour, and undue excess buffoonery, and undue deficiency boorishness, as of a man who frowned gloomily on every innocent jest. This great principle of the mean is in keeping with the whole Greek ideal of culture, as the harmonious development of every part, without onesidedness.

We can see how attractive it must have appeared to a man like the author of this Book, and how easily the principle would give itself to a moral descent in a Jew, whose religious faith was breaking down. He describes one of his moods in what he calls the days of his vanity. He had seen good men failing, and wicked men succeeding, and living out their years, just because they were prudent in their wickedness. And so from that he draws the cynical conclusion of our text. "Be not righteous overmuch, neither be thou overwise. Be not

overmuch wicked, neither be thou too foolish." The great thing is prudence. Do not overdo anything. Do not stick too much to principle; you will only make yourself a bore to other men, and give yourself needless unhappiness. Do not aim too high in anything. If you try to be too good, people will give you the cold shoulder as a fanatic. If you try to be too wise, you will only bring sorrows on yourself, and besides after all it is not very much you can know. Yet, on the other hand, you must not go into excess in the other extreme. Be not overmuch wicked. Don't be a fool. Why shouldest thou die before thy time? And excess means decay of powers, and premature death. Stick to the safe and middle course. It does not pay to be violent on either side. To be desperately religious, or to be desperately irreligious, makes people look askance on you. You will be like a speckled bird in the nest for all the others to peck at. Do not obtrude your principles too much, if you have any. Moderation is the mark of respectability. Take religion easily. Wink a little at others' faults and they will wink at yours. "Be not righteous overmuch." It is not a very high-toned morality this, when we extend it thus, and see what it comes to, but it is the ordinary morality of the world, the practical good

sense of moderation which the world approves, the prudent self-control which passes for wisdom among men.

There is much to be said for this doctrine of moderation even in what is called righteousness, at a time like that in which the writer lived, when righteousness was looked on by most as external ceremonies and keeping of endless rules, rather than as spiritual passion. There is often much justification for the sneer at overmuch righteousness at all times, when the soul has died out of religion and the punctilious keeper of the law becomes self-complacent and censorious of others. It is this gives point and sting, and even justice, to Robert Burns' "Address to the Unco Guid," or the Rigidly Righteous,

> O ye wha are sae guid yoursel,
> Sae pious and sae holy,
> Ye've nought to do but mark and tell
> Your neibours' fauts and folly!

Censoriousness, such as Burns describes, is the temptation of the over-righteous. If righteousness means a rigid adherence to points and details, and if it leads to what St. Paul calls the vainly puffed up mind, then the counsel is good, "Be not righteous overmuch."

It is, however, only in a very limited degree, and

only when the true meaning of righteousness is obscured, that there is any truth in the cynical counsel. If righteousness is inward conformity to the holy will of God, then there can be no limitations set to the standard of righteousness. From this point of view the prudential policy of our text is really a terrible moral degradation. What a decline and fall it was for the author of this Book to have been ever able to so mistake religion! For a Jew to think this, even in a passing mood, was to belie his race, and to betray the faith of his fathers. The Jews had a zeal for God—Paul bears them witness, and the world must bear them witness. It is their glory that they gave the world religion, because of the passion in their very blood for righteousness.

How different this attitude of our text is from that of the prophets and psalmists and saints of the Old Testament! To the prophet Amos this was the most terrible of all punishments of national sin that there would be a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. Not the search after happiness, but the search after holiness is the keynote of the Bible. We can feel the throb, and hear the cry, even in the cold printed page. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul

after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." Another exiled saint, thinking of the privileges of worshipping in the House of God, cries, "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." In presence of this how mean and pitiful appears the worldly policy of prudence, to be moderately good, and not too outrageously bad, because such extremes do not pay!

The doctrine of the golden mean in religion, as our author states it, only needs to be put alongside of such words of psalmists and saints, to stand in condemnation. It is true that moderation is a good quality, but it is not, as Aristotle made it, the essential condition of virtue. Morality needs a higher standard than anything that can be associated with prudence. To dethrone duty from the first place in order to give its room to policy; to make expediency the rule of conduct instead of principle, is to debase man and deny God. Our Lord pronounces His ineffable blessing upon the very men whom this worldly wisdom sneers at. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." They may not have the success and popularity which the prudent trimmer achieves. They have not the pleasant satisfaction and easy contentment which come to the

dulled soul. Nay, they are torn by a passionate desire, and burn with the fervour of longing. They have the pain of heart-hunger and thirst of soul, keener in its sense of need than any craving of appetite. They are weighted by the consciousness of sin, and are driven by a sense of spiritual want. They are tormented by a passion for purity, and they pine after holiness—and nothing but God can fill the aching void of heart.

Victims of unsatisfied desire, smitten by the malady of the ideal,

> Striving to attain
> By shadowing out the unattainable,

how are *they* blessed? Surely there is much to be said for the policy which avoids burdening the life with spiritual discontent, "Be not righteous overmuch." Is that not the way to attain to comfort and respect and a pleasant life, and the affection of our fellows? Yes, that is the way. If you want that harvest, that is the kind of sowing you must do.

But how can there be blessing along with pining, with want, with hunger and thirst, with unappeased desire? Wherein are they blessed? In this way, that desire is ever a note of life. When life begins, need begins. Life is a bundle of want. And the

higher the desire, the higher the life. The body can hunger and thirst, and has its own bodily cravings. The mind hungers and thirsts for knowledge, and when desire stops mental development stops. All development is along the line of desire. The mark of spiritual life is spiritual desire, a moral longing for conformity to the will of God.

There is a school of philosophy, pretentious in its claims, which disposes of the whole question of religion by extending even further the cynical counsel of Ecclesiastes, "Be not righteous overmuch." It says in some form or other, Reduce your wants: Give up all this searching after God, all this attempt to conform to an impossible ideal: Why strive after the unattainable? Why torment yourself with visions of perfection? Why not rest content in a lower plane? The unknown is the unknowable. "Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise." It is a craven creed at the best. Even if there were no satisfaction, even if the world-weary advice of Ecclesiastes were the better policy, even if the malady of the ideal were incurable, it would still be duty to hunger after it, it would still be the best and highest for the living soul, it would still be the master-light of all our seeing. But says Christ, who walked with unclouded vision and certain tread

among spiritual things, "They shall be filled." The unattained is not the unattainable.

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Filled with righteousness, that is. Instinct does not play man false here any more than in any other sphere of need. Bodily hunger means that there is food that can satisfy it. If there is a God-given instinct of the soul, that want also can be supplied. If there is spiritual hunger, there is bread of life to appease it. If there is soul-thirst, there is water of life to quench it. They shall be filled with righteousness; they shall get their desire, obtain that to which they have given their hearts. If a man's earnest desire is God, God will be all in all to him one day. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price"—without price, except the price that ye should really hunger and really thirst.

You cannot follow Jesus on the heights, if yours is the creed of the blasé sensualist, "Be not righteous overmuch." You may go far, but you cannot go there. You cannot know the blessedness of His Kingdom, unless you hunger and thirst after righteousness, with a spiritual craving that will not be

satisfied until you awake in His likeness. To all who watch and pray, with a desire more than they that watch for the morning, this is His blessed promise, "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

IV

WISE OVERMUCH

Neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?—Ecclesiastes vii. 16.

In last sermon we saw how the author of Ecclesiastes applied the doctrine of the mean, of moderation as the secret of life, to religion, and reached the conclusion that it was best for a man to steer a middle course, and not be either over-righteous or over-wicked. We saw what truth there was in the advice as satire on formal religion; and we saw its inherent falseness when contrasted with our Lord's pronouncement, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Here the same doctrine of moderation is extended to the intellectual sphere that the safest course is to avoid extremes here also and to do nothing in excess. As the prudent man will not pain himself by vain efforts after perfect moral excellence but will be content to be moderately righteous and will not seek to pitch his principles to too high a tone; so also

in matters of intellect the prudent man will not shorten his days with too eager speculation and too deep thought. He knows that wisdom is good, and that it is a terrible thing to be a fool, but it is almost as bad to be too wise. The worldly-wise man is not concerned with insoluble problems, and life is full of such problems. He is more concerned about practical things, and he sees that what pays best is practical good sense, and knowledge of life, and skill in affairs. He carefully avoids touching the mysteries, and infinities, and immensities, that surround human life. He feels that such knowledge is too high for him; and besides, that is not the gate to success in the world. As in the question of holiness he shrinks from being infected by the malady of the ideal, so in the question of wisdom, he knows his limitations and will not aim at the stars. "Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?"

The truth of this advice from his own point of view is seen more clearly if we translate the word "destroy" a little more fully. The primary idea of the word is that of silence, being put to silence, and thus it came to mean to be laid waste, or destroyed. But the root meaning is to be made desolate, solitary, and was sometimes used of a lonely

solitary way. So that the question of the writer might be put, Why make thyself solitary? Why isolate thyself? If you are too good, people will turn from you, and call you a fanatic. If you are too wise, people will call you a bore. In any case you only make yourself unhappy. The exceptional always isolates. This is true on both sides, both of too high and too low, and explains why our author should in the same breath counsel his readers against being wicked overmuch and against being too much of a fool. Exceptional goodness or wickedness repels. Not many can breathe the rarefied air of the pit. Not many can have sympathy with the transcendental thinker, and nobody can have patience with a perfect fool with no ideas at all. The successful man is the man versed in the details of life, who knows his way about, who is not too much burdened either with overfine principles or with thin-spun notions; and yet who is both honest and capable. That is the sort of man everybody trusts, the shrewd, prudent, unimaginative, unimpulsive man of affairs, of good principles and clear brain, and yet not an enthusiast either for holiness or for new ideas. Ecclesiastes warns people off from the dangerous ground of the ideal. Why put others out of sympathy with you? he asks. The ordinary man of the

street cannot see your far-away visions of truth or beauty or holiness. If you speak to him of them he will not understand, and will only shrug his shoulders and pass on. The thinker is lonely.

Besides, too much thought unfits you for the ordinary happiness and comfort of life. Confine yourself to the practicable. Man with his limitations can only get a certain length in all his investigations, when he is brought up against an impassable wall. He is baffled in every effort to know more. Like a bird in a cage, he only breaks his own wings with fluttering against the bars. All speculations end in mystery. All knowledge carried far enough up lands in deep darkness. Truth is elusive and only mocks the eager searcher. You scorn delights and live laborious days to find in the end—nothing.

He who speaks thus knows; for he has tried. In his youth he too had dreamed of climbing the heights of truth. "I gave my heart to know wisdom. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit [rather "pursuit of wind"]. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

How pitifully true this is can be seen in the whole history of human thought. Every line on the page is traced in blood. Here too it seems the law of life

that in the sweat of brow shall man eat his bread. In loneliness, in sickness of heart, in despair of the unknown, has every inch of ground been gained for the mind of man. The martyrs of truth are more than are to be found in any Church's hagiology. Only the shallow mind can be satisfied with what it knows, and can imagine that it amounts to very much. Only the trifler with truth can shut his eyes to the infinite mystery that enfolds every subject of knowledge. Why, then, not give up the fruitless quest, and the vain soaring into the empyrean, which ends only in "pursuit of wind"? Stick to the regions which are more accessible. Some things are unknowable: do not fret your soul over them, but confine yourself to what can be ascertained and understood. Let your speculations and questionings and problems alone. There is much force, and a strong appeal to our modern temper of mind, in the advice of our text, "Make not thyself overwise."

Further, there is justification for it even from a moral point of view. As the temptation of the overrighteous is censoriousness and self-satisfaction; so the temptation of the overwise is what St. Paul calls the vainly puffed-up mind, a besotted conceit and pride, as if wisdom will die with them, and

which looks down with contempt on the vulgar unlettered throng. Priggishness dogs the feet of the overwise. But as we saw that censoriousness came not from too much righteousness, but from too little, from a lack of the true spirit of righteousness; so contemptuous pride is the failing not of real but of spurious wisdom. When wisdom is supposed to be information, knowledge of facts, knowledge of books, it lends itself to the puffed-up mind. But these things, scientific facts, literature, are not wisdom; they are only the implements of wisdom, the material by which wisdom works. Wisdom is always humble; for it knows how little it knows.

Quite apart, however, from the possibility of this mistake which gives a kind of colour to his sneer, the advice of Ecclesiastes appeals to us to-day because it fits in with our modern temper. Ours is a time when the supremacy of the practical over the speculative is complete. We see this even in the relative position which science has taken as compared to philosophy. To discuss the questions of philosophy is thought by many to be a foolish waste of time, a vain attempt to make oneself overwise. Even theology, the Queen of the sciences as she used to be called, has been dethroned. Why trouble yourselves with such airy speculations as philosophy and theol-

ogy occupy themselves with? Better assume that there is a region which the mind of man is incapable of entering, such things as God and the human soul, and the ultimate end and meaning of life—these things can never be adequately known, even if they exist. To seek to know them is to try to make yourself overwise. Stick to facts, to material science, and to the practical details of life, and the knowledge of the world. All else are but cloudy vapours which obscure the mental vision, bottled moonshine, of no use for human nature's daily food. It is the merest futility to be ever probing into deep mysteries, and asking with Pilate, What is Truth?

We are over-ridden by the practical in everything. In politics we say that we do not want theories, and ideal reforms, and utopian schemes; we want the practicable, the thing that is expedient at the moment. Not principle but policy is the important thing. In religion we are told that theology, opinions, beliefs, convictions do not count, but only the plain duties of life, the practical virtues, kindness, tolerance, and such like. Even in science the speculative is ruled out, or must take a back seat. To invent a new kind of steam boiler, or a new explosive for shells, to do something that can be classed in the market, or made the basis of a joint-stock company,

that kind of science takes precedence over the deepest knowledge of the truths of nature.

The value of this modern practical spirit must be admitted. It is true that in all these regions, in politics, and religion, and science, the test of the tree must always be its fruit. But we are inclined to take too narrow a view of what the fruits are, and we can easily overreach ourselves by our exclusive standard of what is practical. These practical things on which we lay so much stress do not arrive ready-made, but are the results from a hidden source. In politics, will the fruit, expediency, not wither, when the root, principle, is cut away from it? In religion, will the plain moral duties remain when faith is dead? In science, even the practical man can only apply the discoveries and ascertained truths acquired by the natural philosophers. In all branches of life, though it may not pay to be overwise, and though the secret of success may be to confine yourself to the narrow limits of practical things, yet the progress of the world has been due, and must always be due, to these very same eager strenuous searchers after truth, to those who sought for knowledge as for hid treasure, to those finely tuned spirits who have followed truth though it led them into the wilderness.

A man may give himself to the practical in every sphere of activity simply from cowardice or even meaner motives still. It is possible to avoid some kinds of error by never seeking truth, possible to be free from some ways of going wrong by never trying to go right; but that position is to abrogate our rights as men, and it is to give up in despair all chance of truth, and besides it leads to certain error. It can only mean ignoble error, rather than what is at the worst noble failure. It is easy to sneer at all who are consumed by a passion for purity as over-righteous, and it is easy to sneer at all votaries of truth as making themselves overwise, but it remains true in religion that the one and complete aim of man is to be perfect even as God is perfect; and it remains true in things of intellect, that, as Bacon's noble words have it, "the inquiry of truth, which is the lovemaking or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature."

It is in the region of divine truth that the cynical counsel of our text is most commonly given. To seek to know God, to find out His will, to understand anything about His purpose with us and the world,

is we are told the futile attempt to make ourselves overwise. These things are beyond the bounds of the knowable for us. It is the part of the prudent man to give up all such fruitless strivings. He chooses the lower plane, where there can be some certainty, among the things we can see and touch, and which are open to the senses. If there be a God, man with his finite capacities cannot know Him. He is not only the Unknown, but also the Unknowable.

Even if it were true, as it is false, the counsel would not be the wisdom it claims to be. Even if there were no certain goal for the spirit of man, it would not follow that we should weakly give up the search. The same argument could be applied to all spheres of human knowledge. Not the simplest thing in the so-called matters of fact can be adequately explained. It is not only in religion that there is mystery, but everywhere. By the same argument all knowledge is impossible; for nothing can be completely known. Matter is as great a mystery as mind: mind is as great a mystery as soul. And even if the pursuit of this higher wisdom were doomed to failure, it does not follow that man should fall back on the lower level supinely. It can be no more his duty to let his spiritual faculty become

atrophied than any other power he possesses. There are some failures that are greater than some successes. "That soul makes noble shipwreck who is lost in seeking worlds."

God is not the phantasm that this cynical creed assumes. He has been known of men. Man was made for God. His heart-hunger declares it. And says Christ, who spoke with the assurance of One who stood in the full noon of truth, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "I am the Truth," He says. He is the truth about God. If we would know God, we must know Him. There is in these words opened up to us a different conception both of man and of God than we have in the agnostic counsel of despair. It is not making ourselves overwise thus to seek to know God: it is indeed fulfilling the law of our own nature. It is an infinite task that is presented to us, but not therefore an impossible task. Because we have not attained is the very reason why we must follow after, not why we must give up. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." To know Christ, to love Him, to follow Him, to serve Him, to become like Him—this is the task of life. Your life has its value not from its attainments and possessions, but from its aim and spirit. Your life has

value not from what you get but what you seek. Shut your ears to the low creed that would degrade you as man. Pray, believe, hope, love. "Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you."

V

IS LIFE A BLESSING?

It had been good for that man if he had not been born.—
St. Matthew xxvi. 24.

Can it be said of a human life that it would have been better that it had never been? Men have sometimes said it of themselves. In some deep affliction, in some spasm of pain, in some great depression of soul, a man has cursed the day of his birth. Many a time life has appeared a very doubtful blessing, and sometimes a positive evil. Men have longed for death to get out of their troubles or sorrows or pain. Overworn, over-weary souls have sighed for the rest of the grave with a sentimental pleasure in the thought of the long sleep, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. This is different from the other judgment which makes the gift of life itself a mistake. Better dead is not the same as better never to have been born. A man might well have a mood which welcomes death, but who still is glad to have lived and counts life a blessed thing. A good man who had

made much of life and done much in it and fought the good fight manfully might yet be willing to lay down his arms. It is not necessarily to despise the gift of life to be ready to have done with it and to think that he has had enough of it here. We may even say that it is the natural fruit of the best life to be ready for the harvest, to be timely wise for the inevitable. Age should bring the mellow ripeness to which all earth's suns and summer can add nothing further. God shepherds many a soul into the eternal fold with great peace and even with glad hope. There is nothing unnatural and unexpected in age, for example, being ready and perhaps eager to go when the summons comes.

> It is time to be old,
> To take in sail:—
> The god of bounds
> Who sets to sea a shore,
> Came to me in his fatal rounds,
> And said, No more!

St. Paul, who had filled up his glorious life with great thoughts and great deeds, was willing to remain for his life-work's sake, that he might still serve, but was also willing to depart, which he said was to him far better. There are some weak and cowardly reasons which make some long for death

and even seek it, but a similar mood may be induced by the noblest of all reasons. A high sense of honour even will make death seem preferable to disgrace. "It were better for me to die," said Paul, "than that any man should make my glorying void" —better dead than that he should so lose his reputation that he would be a hindrance instead of a help to the great cause he had at heart. It is no reflection upon the value of life to make such a judgment; indeed it may be because of the high worth placed upon life that death may also be valued.

There is thus a clear distinction between the verdict that it would be better to die, and the other verdict that it would have been better never to be born. This latter suggests that life itself is a mistake, or at least, that the particular life has been no good gift. Even here we cannot indiscriminately label this as unworthy pessimism, the weak whimper of a craven soul. It is our Lord's deliberate judgment here about a man who was a disciple of His own and who therefore had made at least one high and noble decision. And if we think seriously and observe dispassionately, there are probably occasions and circumstances about which we would all declare that should a man be there, "it had been good for that man if he had not been born." This, too, not

always in the way of passing a moral judgment on a particular life. We can easily conceive of situations where it might be true of even whole populations. Have we not thought it reverently and sorrowfully of the little children who have suffered under the shameful atrocities of the unspeakable Turk? Might we not say it often of some of our own little children in our cities, born to little chance of anything true and pure and beautiful in life?

There is a bright cheerful optimism which speaks largely and gaily of the joy of life, and which shuts its eyes to the facts or looks at them through rose-coloured spectacles. That surface good opinion of the world as the best of all possible worlds fills one with nausea at its shallowness and comfortable make-belief. If you wink the eyes very hard on occasions, you can see what you want to see and hold on to your pleasant theories. Pessimism may be false, but that sort of facile optimism *is* false. It is not big enough to take in the facts of life and history. Pessimism, which holds that it would have been better for men not to have been born, at least accepts the hard and ugly and crooked facts, acknowledges evil and pain and unhappiness, all the shame and despair of life. It draws the dismal deduction from the facts

that life is not a blessing, that the world's evil is incurable, and that the judgment of Christ here on Judas would be a true judgment on all men. Whatever we have to say about the deduction, it is much to have the facts acknowledged.

Now it is a fact that good men not only have felt this despair of others and of mankind as a whole, but have also sometimes confessed it of themselves. Job in his pain cursed his day and said, "Let the day perish wherein I was born." He is represented as having had a happy and prosperous life, full of peace and plenty and usefulness and faith. Does it seem like pettish irritation that, when he suffered loss and pain and sorrow, he should bemoan his lot and despise the whole gift of life? That is to misread his situation. It was not just his own personal pain that made him cry out in despair. It was the deeper problem which his pain represented. It was all bound up in his faith in God; and for him to lose that faith was to lose everything. The whole fabric of his faith was falling, and he seemed to be sitting in his misery and solitude among the ruins. Would it not be true still of all men of faith, that if they could not believe in God they could no longer believe in human life? Life in its large sense would be an intolerable burden, tantalised by its mystery and

oppressed by its futility. They might well think it all a huge farce, and declare that it would be better for men never to have been born, if they are only born for this ultimate failure.

Or it may come in another form as it did to the prophet Jeremiah, who said, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making *him* very glad," he adds pathetically. He was a sensitive soul, feeling himself called to a great work to proclaim God's will to his people whom he loved, and meeting with obloquy and contempt and his message received with scorn and refusal. He had to see the fated nation stagger to its doom in spite of himself, seemingly in spite of God also. The anguish of his soul forced from him the bitter cry, because here, too, it was not his own personal pain that was the problem. It was, as in Job's case, almost like the negation of God to the prophet; for it looked as if God were powerless, or as if Jeremiah was cherishing a delusion in thinking himself a prophet of God at all. But these we may say were only temporary moods in both Job and Jeremiah; for they both kept their faith in God and came out into the light. That is true, and so there is nothing like real pessimism in either Job or

Jeremiah. There it was only a mood and not the central faith. Out-and-out pessimism could not be better defined than by the words of our text that it says bluntly and almost brutally, It had been good for man if he had not been born.

It may begin with a personal sense of emptiness and disappointment, making a man believe that his own life is not worth living. Or it may come through looking out on the world, seeing its evil with sharp eyes and believing that the evil is incurable, till mere life is thought of not as a boon but a curse. As in Ecclesiastes, "I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praise the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better than both is he which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work which is done under the sun." This terrible depression of mind was due not to any sorrow of self, but to the contemplation of the sorrows of others. It is the same sentiment as the verse of the Chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus,* commenting on the grief and woes of the hapless Oedipus,

> The happiest fate of man is not to be;
> And next in bliss is he who soon as born,
> From the vain world and all its sorrows free,
> Shall whence he came with speediest foot return.

Does this solemn judgment of our Lord on Judas, using the same words almost, give colour to the verdict of pessimism? It at least disposes of the shallow optimism of which we spoke. But what has it to say to the rival theory of the worthlessness of life? It also pronounces on that man that it would have been good if he had not been born. Yet there is no support given to the idea that life as such is a curse and a mistake. Rather the words of Jesus imply the very opposite, that life is a blessed and glorious thing, a great gift which is also and therefore a great responsibility. Here Judas is stated as a great exception, a burden of guilt and misery so heavy as to counteract the immense value Jesus put upon a single life. It is judgment not on life, but on an evil life, a pronouncement of doom on the waste and tragic failure of a life. The whole underlying implication is that life itself is a great gift and a great blessing, but Judas had forfeited the gift and turned the blessing into a curse.

Was it not a true judgment? To have been born, to have tasted both the joy and the power of life,

to have grown into manhood and had glimpses of the best possible in life, to have met the Christ and heard His call, to have felt the thrill of response as he turned and followed the highest, to have companioned with Jesus and spent days and nights in His fellowship, and then to have ended in this infamy, to have nursed the traitor's heart against all the promptings of his best nature and to have done the traitor's deed—what else could be said of that tragedy but that it had been good for that man if he had never been born? It is not to pronounce a judgment of pessimism on human life, but to pronounce a judgment of failure on that wasted life. It is not to declare that life itself is a curse, but that a man may *make* it a curse to himself and others.

What distinguishes absolutely our Lord's judgment from pessimism is that with Him the standard is not personal happiness, but the moral value of the life. Those who say that life is not worth living usually mean that it has not enough happiness or too much unhappiness in it. If pleasure fails and peace departs, if days of darkness come and sorrow is the portion, then you may curse the day of birth and be sorry you ever lived. But our Lord had other standards of life than that, and judged the worth or the worthlessness of life by other measures.

It might be better never to have lived indeed He held, but for other reasons than because evil days come when a man may say with truth, I have no pleasure in them. Life meant a great gift with opportunities of being something and becoming something, as well as enjoying something. It is the moral value of a life which judges it, not the personal happiness it contained.

Is life a blessing? It depends on what you mean by life. From this standpoint you may have had no success and little of the sunshine; you may have nothing to show for all your years of effort; you may have known pain and tasted sorrow, and yet life may be eminently worth living, and having finished the course you pass out rich with the spoils of life. While, you may have had your years filled with success and happiness, have hardly known ache or pain, tasted of every pleasure and joy, drank of the cup of life that ran over, have been quite sure that it was worth your while to live since it brought you so much satisfaction, and yet for the higher ends of life, for the true meaning of living, it may be said that it would have been good for you never to have been born.

If we would escape from the doom of Judas we must take our life solemnly as a great gift, thank-

fully rejoicing in all that is light and sweet and beautiful in it, but also seriously accepting the great moral responsibility of the gift. Even if the joy of life is gone, its duties remain, and its opportunities for service. This is certain, from Christ's standpoint, that if a man's life has been a curse to others, if he has lived to blight and corrupt, it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Remember the stern word of the gentle Christ: "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on Me to stumble, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

VI

HUMILITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.—ROMANS xii. 3.

AFTER the dogmatic statement of Christian truth, contained in the first part of this great Epistle, with its keen logic and wealth of historical illustration, St. Paul proceeds to give the practical conclusions which follow to the Christian community. He shows how the faith which he has built up in reasoned steps carries an implication, on their part, who hold the faith, to live it out in conduct. St. Paul never elaborates the doctrinal side of religion for its own sake. The doctrinal exists for the sake of the ethical. The two are ever interwoven into the fabric of his thought. Christian conduct, Christian duty, Christian character, flow from Christian doctrine, as a stream from its fountain. Having shown the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God in the scheme of Christian truth,

he drives home the conclusion that complete self-surrender to God is reasonable service. The purpose of it all in the mind of God, and therefore the aim that men are called on to set before them, is a transformed life, a renewed mind, a proving in practice of the perfect will of God.

St. Paul begins with the fact of the existing Church, and the duties which rest upon all members of the Church. The keynote of the whole is mutual service. All organisation, all individual gifts of teaching, exhorting, liberality, must be subservient to this great end. So the first emphasis is laid on personal humility and modesty. Because the Church is one body of which we each are members, because the Church exists for the good of the whole, there is no room for self-exaltation. St. Paul is himself here an example of humility in the very way he recommends the duty. He presumes to advise "through the grace given unto me"—not of his own wisdom or goodness. The sweet humble way in which St. Paul advises is the strongest argument of his sermon. The Christian is not to be haughty and lofty-minded, but to think soberly of himself, with insight into his place in the body of Christ, with wise discretion, not asserting himself, considering in all things the edification of all. This is essential for

the sake of peace in the Church, for the sake of order and good government. The Christian must not be self-pushing, but should measure his gifts and opportunities of service, ever subserving self to the good of the whole. There is no scope for selfish ambition and boasting; for the wise man knows that his talents and position are not due to merit in himself, but have been given him by God. The fellowship of faith and life is the common bond, which will cure all individual excess. The true solution is not shutting the eyes to the fact of difference among men: the difference is there, a palpable difference of gifts; but they are all given by God, and must all be consecrated to God and to the service of others. The very finest gifts in the world are ruined by vanity and conceit, and their social value is lost.

The value of a gift is its social value. This is why St. Paul insists so much in all his Epistles on humility when he refers to the function of the Church. Without it the Church cannot do her work. This is why St. Paul says in this very letter, "Be not high-minded, but fear" and "Be not wise in your own conceits"; and here, "I say," a solemn declaration as the word implies, "I say unto every man among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, accord-

ing as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." There is here the true middle course between the extremes of false self-esteem and false humility. His purpose is to encourage them to service, to cultivate their gifts. Thus, he does not set before them as an ideal any kind of self-abnegation which would mean the withdrawal of any from service. That on the one hand. And on the other hand, in order to make that service really effective it is necessary to purge it from self-exaltation. They are to measure themselves in all sobriety of judgment, that without presumption, and yet without shrinking, they may put all their gifts at the service of the Church.

This touches on one of the greatest difficulties of life in every sphere, as well as in the religious. From the failures on both sides of the golden mean, we see how difficult it is for men to get a just and true estimate of self. It is not easy to steer a straight course, to avoid Scylla on the one side, and Charybdis on the other, to avoid being driven on the rocks by undue self-trust, and avoid being sucked into the whirlpool by undue self-mistrust. For true balance of character and to produce the best work in any line, it is necessary for a man to have both humility, and also self-confidence. There

is a false humility, which weakens a man and unfits him for the duties of life. It is often indistinguishable from moral cowardice, a refusal to put forth the best powers, a slackness of moral tissue which may be as fatal a form of self-indulgence as any other form of it. Some escape the snares of ambition and worldliness by falling willingly into meaner snares. If ambition is an infirmity, it at least often submits to scorn delights and live laborious days. If vainglory will make a man think too highly of himself; so this cowardice will make him think so meanly of himself that he shrinks from all high endeavour. It will make him say weakly to every noble cause, to every urgent appeal, "It is not for me; such things are too high for me; I am only a very humble member of the family, or the community, or the Church." There are many cheap and exaggerated reputations in the world; but I am not sure but that the reputation for humility may not be the cheapest of them all in some cases. To get it, you only need to lie low, and say nothing, and never take an independent stand. No useful work is possible from the man who is so mistrustful of himself that he will not even try.

As there is a false humility which spoils character and work, so there is an overweening conceit

which is equally weak and which keeps a man from his true place of usefulness. An exaggerated sense of personal importance, an inordinate ambition for the first places, an egotism which judges of everything according as it affects that sweet gentleman self, a self-pushing, self-advertising spirit which will not enter into anything unless self is to be the first dog in the hunt—that is the other extreme against which St. Paul warns the Roman Christians. We see it in life in all quarters, marring harmony among brethren, preventing successful co-operation in good, a source of strife and failure, hindering progress in every branch. We see it in Church and State, in the family and the civic life, in business and play. Even a football team cannot win a match because single members think so highly of themselves, and aim at personal glory instead of the success of the side. We hear it said of a strong man in politics, in business, in religion, even in the Christian Ministry, that he will not work alongside of others, that he is too self-opinionative, that indeed nobody can work with him, however good the cause may be. Ambition in this sense of self-esteem, is not the infirmity of noble minds alone; it fastens even more securely on mean minds.

Now, it is no easy task to which St. Paul sets us

not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. For it is difficult to convince us that we do think more of self than we *ought*. To himself each man is the universe. A man knows his own needs and wishes better than he can know those of others. His own inclinations make imperious demands on him. It is easy to become self-centred; for nobody is so important to you as you yourself.

The difficulty is increased if, as we have seen, it is at the same time essential not to minimise and undervalue any gift a man has. We can see this difficulty in every sphere of human life. Take art for example. It is necessary for an artist to know his limitations, and to submit to them. If he thinks he has reached the summit of his art and is filled with self-complacency, his work becomes weak and worthless. Without humility he can never rise above the commonplace. Here, as elsewhere in all human endeavours, it is only the meek who inherit the kingdom. Yet much feebleness in art and tiresome repetition are due to lack of courage, to a false humility, a base content with the small. This is only an illustration of our text that both modesty and confidence are needed.

St. Paul's whole argument in this passage is that God has given to men certain gifts, different in

kind and in degree; and it is essential for each to know these with accuracy, and to judge of them with sobriety, that we may use them effectively. Humility is thus not an ignorance, real or affected, of what our gifts are, but a proper valuation of them. Vanity comes from a false estimate. Think what it would mean for the Church as an associated endeavour after the Christian life, if every member looked on this subject sacredly, as St. Paul asks. If none shirked responsibility; if none avoided work through weakness, and none assumed it through conceit; if all thought of mutual service, what diligence would be put into our ministering, what patience into our teaching, what liberality into our giving, what fervency into our prayers, what love into our service! If we only thought of the complete good of Christ's body the Church, and Christ's strayed sheep in the wilderness, how we would comfort and strengthen each other; and look for open doors for well-doing! The sobriety of judgment about self which St. Paul recommends would induce humility; and humility would make the whole social atmosphere sweet.

Candid and courageous self-examination would for one thing kill censoriousness, the canker of so many Christian characters. An enlightened man, who has looked at himself steadily, is more concerned

about his own faults than about the faults of others, of which he has less knowledge. Censoriousness is fed by vanity. The social relations which begin with, "conscious as we are of each other's infirmities," are sure to be strained relations. Vanity gets rid of the thought of personal weakness by magnifying the faults of others; and that is why censoriousness can only be cured by adopting St. Paul's method of self-examination. Humility is a thing of the spirit, and cannot be put on like a cloak. A man does not become humble by simulating the form of it, by any outside method of repression, such as refusing to speak about himself, or by speaking about the bad in him. Self-condemnation is often only a subtler vanity. It may even be that a man is thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think, when he imagines that his importance is such that he may indulge in the luxury of confession. Poor weak human nature can enjoy itself immensely with making confession, as many criminals used to do before public execution, making their confession as spicy as possible, and getting pleasure from the thought of the sensation they would create by the relation of their sins and their repentance.

How are we to attain to the balance of character, which will be both humble and strong, which

will avoid both self-exaltation and self-abnegation? "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." We need to have heart and life submitted to the searching light, which while it reveals all flaws, yet inspires with hope. The first vision of Christ seems given for our despair; and then He becomes our inspiration. This seems an impossible combination of ideas; and yet it is natural. When a man comes into the presence of God, the first effect seems blighting, and withering. He can only be to himself a poor worm of the dust, and realise for the first time the absolute nothingness of the human. He is emptied of all pretensions, in complete effacement of self. The trembling question is, "What is man and the son of man?" Nothing great is possible to the man who has not been thus emptied of self, beat down, and broken, lying helpless at the feet of God.

But it does not end there. There comes a strange revulsion of feeling, and the dawning of a new hope. The thought creeps in that it is possible for man to have relations with the eternal, that God does visit him, and does remember him; till the thought becomes a word of encouragement and command, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee." This inspiring consciousness of

communion with God strengthens, as well as humbles. It is a new stream of vitality flooding every vein, and bathing every nerve. And the man rises, never again to think presumptuously, not to think more highly of himself than he ought; and yet stronger in the knowledge that God thinks him worthy to be His and to serve Him. True self-surrender to God takes away self-exaltation, and at the same time saves from despair; for it shows a man that God has a place for him in His purpose of love, and crowns him with the nobility of service. This is the secret of St. Paul's declaration through the grace given unto him, to every man among us, not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but to think soberly, according as God has given to each the measure of faith.

VII

THE SOLITARINESS OF PRINCIPLE

A certain people . . . and their laws are diverse from all people.—ESTHER iii. 8.

IN this story of the Persian Empire it is related how Haman, the king's chief favourite, felt insulted because Mordecai the Jew neglected to give him sufficient honour. His wounded dignity demanded revenge, but could not be satisfied with merely inflicting punishment on the man who had offended him. To offend the second man in the Empire needed a wider punishment than that. Because Mordecai was a Jew he would have the indignity wiped out by the extermination of the whole tribe. So Haman, by a little judicious flattery of the king, and by misrepresenting the character of the Jewish exiles who lived within the bounds of the great Persian Empire, got a decree against them. The charge that he brought against them was of course not the personal one of injured dignity, but that they were a peculiar people, who had laws of

their own other than the laws of the Empire, that therefore they were a source of danger to the kingdom, and it was in the king's interest and in the interests of peace to get rid of them. "There is a certain people dispersed among the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from those of every people." It was a false charge, as Haman made it, implying a Jewish conspiracy against the empire. It was meant to prejudice the king against them, as if they were seditious and practically rebels. But in another sense it was true. It is often the true word that comes from the mouth of the enemy, in another sense than that in which he uses it. Haman's accusation was true. The Jews were a separate people even in the midst of the Persian Empire, with rites, and ceremonies, and religious beliefs, and practices of their own. They were apart from all others, peculiar, unique among all the provinces of Persia, with separate faith, with strange ways, with laws diverse from those of every people.

The same sort of charge was made against the Christian faith in the Roman Empire, with the same falseness and evil purpose, and with the same inherent truth. Christians were persecuted and harried because of their singularity, because they were in Rome and yet did not do as the Romans did.

They were charged with sedition and rebellion; and their singularity gave point to the accusation. Many a Haman vented his personal spite by similar charges. The process began early with the Christians. At Philippi, when the masters of a maid that Paul had cured saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the rulers; and when they had brought them unto the magistrates they said, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs, which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans." At Thessalonica they were again brought before the rulers with the charge, "These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another King, one Jesus." It was true that these Christians were turning the world upside down. In a deeper sense than their accusers knew, or meant, the charge was true that they were singular, and stood apart from all others, a world within the world of Rome, and had laws diverse from those of all other people.

Progress is ever got by dissent. There must be points of departure, lines of cleavage, difference; or else there is stagnation and ultimate death. The law is universal in the development of life; and it

is true in the higher reaches of the spiritual in man. It is from singularity that the race has hope for the future. Great movements of thought have ever sprung from dissent. Men might go on till doomsday, repeating the old and the usual, but at the best that is only marking time, not progressing. Our Christian religion lays greater stress than ever on the solitariness of principle, making it even an individual thing instead of a racial difference, as with the Jews. The Church is set in the world as a model for the world, a great object-lesson to induce it upward to a higher level of thought and action. And what is the Church but a certain people whose laws are diverse from those of all other peoples. That at least is the standard and ideal for the Church. But the Christian faith, with its doctrine of the special illumination of the Holy Spirit to the receptive soul, goes even further, and puts the emphasis on the individual, making the soul responsible to God alone. It enforces the imperative of principle, calling a man out, if need be, to stand alone, making him, it may be, diverse from all people for conscience' sake. Faith has ever a protest, tacit often, but none the less real.

A great soul is alone. From the very nature of the case greatness in anything isolates. The more

exceptional you become, the smaller becomes the circle of true relationship. Socially this is so, in its own petty way. In a society which is rigidly ruled by impassable social laws, the higher up you go, the more rarefied the atmosphere becomes, the more select the members of the society are and therefore the more isolated. Intellectually the same fact is seen. The larger the brain, the fewer the mental peers. A great scholar can have scholarly intercourse only with a limited number. Even morally and spiritually there is a very real sense in which this fact is true. The higher a man's ideal, the fewer are the hearts that can share it. The mass of men have little sympathy with the transcendental thinker. Behold this dreamer cometh—and they put him in a pit. Only with a man's peers can he have full communion. The crowd is repelled by too great earnestness and zeal. Have you never felt uncomfortable in the presence of an ardent reformer, a zealot for something you were lukewarm about? You vowed you would give him the cold shoulder next time he tried to button-hole you. This may not necessarily mean blame to you, for he may have been only a faddist or a busybody. But still it illustrates the fact. Kinship of soul is necessary for communion. I daresay there were many who thought

Paul a faddist; certainly he repelled people as well as attracted. Few ever had such bitter enemies —well-meaning men some of them, who thought him dangerous. The laws of his life were too diverse for them. It is a commonplace of criticism that the great men are often neglected while they live, and only discovered when they are dead. The prophet runs the risk of having no honour in his own country and time. A great man is always, to begin with, in a minority. Commonplace men on the whole prefer the commonplace. Jeremiah, the most spiritually-minded man of his day, had to stand alone. He was a tender soul, capable of the truest personal love, and yet felt that he was a man of strife and contention to the whole land. A man who faces a great enterprise must be prepared for defections even among his closest friends. The larger the claims made on them, the smaller becomes the response. The longer the race and the harder the pace, the fewer stay out to the goal. Now here, now there, a Demas forsakes Paul. He is no longer in full sympathy with him, or finds the demands on his friendship too many—at any rate, he goes to his own place.

We think of Christ's words, with their keen insight into the deeps of human nature, "Behold the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered,

every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone." Even before the scattering He was isolated, because He was unique. In a sense He was alone all His life. Typical of His whole ministry is that striking scene when He set His face to go to Jerusalem for the last time. The disciples were awed by the very look on His face, and drew back to discuss together their petty questions about precedence in the kingdom, while the Master walked on alone. He had thoughts they could not enter into, feelings they were strangers to, desires such as they never dreamed of; there were things they might know hereafter, but could not know then. "They understood not His sayings," is a note that can be often made regarding His intercourse with them. Christ's elevation of soul and purity of heart meant solitude. He was alone in a sense, and a degree, in which neither Paul nor any other man could be alone, though Paul also in his degree had to pay the penalty of greatness. The servant could not escape where the Master suffered. It is the law of solitariness of principle.

So, for the making of a great character, there must be a certain contempt for criticism. A man must be willing to be diverse in his standards of judgment and in his way of living. He must dare to

be singularly good. "With me," says St. Paul, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." A man must rate current opinion at its right value, and must never lay too much stress on popular favour and praise. Milton expresses this contrast in his own great way:—

> They extol
> Things vulgar, and, well weighed, scarce worth the praise.
> They praise and they admire they know not what,
> And know not whom, but as one leads the other.
> And what delight to be by such extolled,
> To live upon their tongues, and be their talk,
> Of whom to be dispraised were no small praise?
> His lot who dares be singularly good.

But this singularity must be the fruit of principle to be worth anything; it must be for conscience' sake. The diverseness from all other people must be in obedience to laws, which make their irresistible appeal to conscience. If it is due to desire for notoriety, or through eccentricity, it is beneath contempt. A good deal of dissent from accepted positions has an unworthy source, sometimes due to mere temper and stupid self-will, or to conceit and love of being singular. It is a cheap way to notoriety for a thick-skinned man by protesting, and dissenting, and riding rough-shod over established custom. But the cure for such is simple. This weak craving for notice

will be curbed by the thought that all singularity carries with it a corresponding responsibility. It tunes the life to a high pitch; and failure is all the more pitiful. It demands stern adherence to principle. It fixes a more inflexible standard. Dr. Johnson, writing of Dean Swift in the *Lives of the Poets*, says: "Singularity, as it implies a contempt of general practice, is a kind of defiance which justly provokes the hostility of ridicule; he, therefore, who indulges peculiar habits is worse than others, if he be not better." This is a true principle of judgment in all matters of dissent from established opinion and custom. It is a principle which our Lord applied to His followers. He made demands on them larger and higher than the world asked. "What do ye more than others?" He asked. If you are diverse from others, if you are set apart from them, and yet obey not a grander law, what do ye more than others? The only excuse for laws diverse from all people is that they should be higher laws, and be obeyed with whole-hearted loyalty. And the very moral necessity laid upon a man's conscience to be singular, the unflinching advocacy of an unpopular cause for conscience' sake, gives to the character strength and solidity. Such a man, called to live a life of protest, serves his generation better than the

whole unthinking crowd who are swept along by the mere momentum of numbers. He may make mistakes, and lay the emphasis wrongly on accidental details sometimes; but better that than dull uniformity, where every coat is cut to the same pattern, every opinion and idea is rounded off, and smoothed down, and hall-marked. The conventional has always its swarm of adherents; the original has to fight for even a foothold.

In the last issue a man is not absolved from complicity in evil because he has followed a multitude. He is called to be loyal to the truth as he knows it, as conscience directs, however diverse it seems to make his way from the common path. However many are the temptations on the one hand to crankiness, and eccentricity, and conceit, far more deadly are the temptations on the other side, to weakness, and cowardice, and pliable principles, and the stifling of conscience. Young men are sometimes charged with forwardness, and too great desire to be singular, and to take up a position different from the conventional. That may be so with a few; but with most the very opposite is the charge that could be substantiated, of moral cowardice, of weakness in following their own instincts. They are too easily cowed into giving up their principles, too easily

moved by a sneer, too easily brow-beaten by a majority. If in the presence of temptation they stood to their guns, there would be more moral victories, and a finer type of manhood developed amongst us. If we were less afraid of singularity for conscience' sake, if we lived to God and not to our fellowmen, there would be less marking time and more marching in the battlefield of life.

Be true to your best self; be true to principle; be true to God. Let the world stand where it will, stand you on the side of whatsoever things are pure, honourable, just, lovely, of good report. Be not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation. Work not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. When sinners entice, consent ye not. Give Christ His place in the midst, the throne of the heart, the judgment-seat of the Church; and the charge spoken in blame will be an eternal glory, "a certain people whose laws are diverse from all people."

VIII

THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS

The way of transgressors is hard.—PROVERBS xiii. 15.

THE actual words of this proverb are difficult, and it looks as if the text were corrupt. The Revised Version translates it "the way of the treacherous is rugged." With the best emendations of the text it may be impossible to make sure of how this particular proverb actually ran. But fortunately there is nothing at stake in the way of doctrine. The words I have taken as text are no isolated words, and the thought they contain does not depend on the translation of a single proverb. I could easily have found other sayings from this very chapter, without looking any further, sayings which simply repeat in other forms the thought of this verse. "A righteous man hateth lying, but a wicked man cometh to shame." "Righteousness guardeth him that is upright in the way, but wickedness overthroweth the sinner." "The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out." "The law of the

wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." "Evil pursueth sinners, but the righteous shall be recompensed with good." These are all taken from this same chapter; and our special text thus not only agrees with one stream of teaching in the Bible but is in keeping with the special somewhat prudential morality of this chapter from which it is taken.

I choose the words though they are differently translated in the Revised Version, and though they are even pronounced untranslatable altogether by some critics, because the words themselves are so common and express so simply and clearly an accepted fact of moral life. They have been used as the headline of copybooks for generations, and have been quoted till they are embedded in the common morality of the man in the street. When a man breaks the law, gives way to sudden temptation, embezzles a trust, or the like, and then in consequence is beset with difficulty and face to face with exposure and shame, and at last is confronted by the avenger and the expected disgrace and punishment are meted out, the words that come to us to sum up the moral of the situation are that the way of transgressors is hard.

It is more on the surface than other more pro-

found judgments of the Bible, such as "The wages of sin is death." Being more of a surface judgment it has naturally more currency among us; for at the best we can only judge of the surface of life. When we see a man reaping thus publicly the fruit of his own misdeed, we think of all he has suffered long before the crisis came, the shifts he employed to escape discovery, his constant alarms and fears. We imagine him walking on his chosen way, but never with peace of heart, on the alert at every touch, never knowing when the hand will be laid on his shoulder that tells him the sorry game is up. We can imagine him even almost glad that the worst has come and that his sin has found him out; for at least he will be done with all the pain of suspense. The actual punishment meted out by the broken law is not the only, nor always the worst, element of all that goes to prove the truth of the proverb that the way of transgressors is hard. The words are thus a part of our conventional ethics, rising to our lips to point a moral.

All our great dramatists and novelists preach this one sermon. What studies in nemesis Shakespeare has given in King Richard III, in Macbeth, in all his great tragedies! Relentlessly, unerringly he shows the disclosure of the wages of sin. In Richard III he gives a picture of the complete villain, panoplied

against remorse, callous, cruel, selfish, an artist in crime, disavowing even the ordinary restraints of conscience, asserting

> Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
> Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.

He knows himself to be subtle, false, and treacherous. Without compunction, without natural weakness, without pity he goes on from crime to crime and from success to success. There seems no way to get at him, no way even to truly punish him, impenetrable in his utter callousness. And yet with matchless skill and keenest moral insight Shakespeare makes us feel, and in the climax of retribution represents Richard himself as feeling, that nemesis has been dogging him all his life, that his way has been a hard way and its end destruction. The irony of it all makes us almost pity the miserable wretch who is heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, though we too breathe in relief at last as Richmond comes with the news:

> God and your arms be praised, victorious friends;
> The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead.

All the great masters who have depicted human life, poets, novelists, dramatists, bring out in varied form the invariable wages of sin; and we can under-

stand why George Eliot, who has herself given us some tragic studies, should say, "Nothing in this world is worth doing wrong for." You could finish up all their studies of life with this concluding moral, that the way of transgressors is hard. It cannot be simply a surface truth when we find all these great observers uniting in the one moral of life.

There are many illustrations of the proverb to be seen in our own daily experience, in business life, in professional life, in private and public life. Every daily newspaper furnishes new illustrations. Every town can show its victim, of a young man who has begun the work of life in innocence and hope, straying from the path of probity, entangling himself with many sorrows and difficulties, ending in disgrace and misery and shame. I could paint pictures to you from real life, of cases I have known, that might sound a little sensational but whose substantial truth you would admit. I could take you to hospitals and asylums and prisons and tell you chapters from real life-stories with gruesome endings of disease and death, which would make you say yourself as the only fitting commentary, Truly the way of transgressors is hard.

But life is not run on these simple lines, else there never could be any doubt nor possibly any tempta-

tion. It is not the case that men and events resolve themselves so easily into two distinct sections. There are not only many exceptions to this item of common ethics, but if we look closer we are sometimes tempted to think that there is no rule at all and that the moral world is topsy-turvy. The Old Testament writers who held most firmly to the truth of our proverb were confronted by these manifold exceptions and doubts. They saw the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. We too, as we look on life, cannot be sure that the way of transgressors is always hard. It often seems, and is, a broad way and an easy, while the other is the hard and narrow path. It is true that all our earthly law is made of express purpose to make the way of transgressors hard, but it so often fails of its purpose. It sometimes even brings penalties to men of conscience, and the meshes of the legal net are not fine enough to catch all offenders against true justice. Even in the breaking of physical and moral law the penalties are often so unfairly divided. A sin of ignorance is as savagely treated as a sin of wilful evil. There seem no distinctions, none of the discriminations we feel to be necessary for justice. An evil man who plays his cards carefully can get off, and a mere blunderer is caught in the wheels and mangled. Take any sin you like, can

you say that punishment is measured out in due proportion to desert? Can you say that the way of the transgressor is made hard according to the quality of the transgression? Of our earthly penalties and social punishments can you say that they are tempered to the colour and degree of the particular guilt? Is the light of the righteous always a bright flame and is the lamp of the wicked always put out? Is the good man always recompensed with good and the bad man always brought to shame?

Neither in our day nor in any day has this been so; and so we take the words that the way of transgressors is hard, and look a little deeper into them to see if there is truth deep down as well as on the surface. The truth on the surface we have already seen, though it is not invariable. But the very word transgression suggests to us an element of hardness more constant than the surface truth. To transgress means to pass over or beyond, to get across, and so to violate bounds, such as the limits of a law. Transgression brings before us what a man has to surmount, something he has to climb or leap or get over somehow by effort. There are bounds natural and acquired which a man must break through to transgress, and it is always hard to do that. In a sense sin is easy and seems even natural. It appears

to be along the line of least resistance. You only need to let yourself go with the crowd without the pain of thought or decision, without breaking with any pleasant custom or habit or companionship. The way is easy and broad, and it is the narrow way that seems the hard way. It is simple and easy to appease the lower nature, and know nothing of the long passion of the saints, no tears, no drops as it were of blood, no soaring aspirations with which to keep up, no large ideal for which to strive. It is not the way of transgressors that is hard, but the other way that is so straight and strict.

But that is only a surface view of human nature and life. That is to leave out of account the other factors, the higher side of your being as truly part of your being as any physical appetite. That is to leave out of account instincts and memories and stirrings of soul, all that is now become part of your spiritual constitution. Transgression is not only want of conformity to God's will, but also it is to do violence to your own nature. You have to break bounds to transgress. There are barriers which are in our life through heredity, through education, through environment, or however they have come, barriers in memory, in instincts, in conscience, in the law written on the heart. There are very real

barriers and difficulties in our nature which we must break down before we can transgress, and which make the way of transgressors hard though there should be no outward penalty. If it should never end in any sort of outward exposure or punishment, yet the violation of moral law carries its own sting. "Whose breaketh a hedge a serpent shall bite him."

Life for you means an *enclosure* with definite limits on certain sides. There is a hedge confining you. You are restricted by the moral laws of life, and even by the social rules of your upbringing. You are free, yet bound. You may kick over the traces and make for what you think liberty, but not without pain and danger and hardship can it be done. You who have been hedged round with precept and example, with religious training, with Christian education, who have been hedged round with law and with love, you cannot transgress without hardship:— "Whoso breaketh a hedge a serpent shall bite him." It may be that others who have known no better can find the broad way easy, but it is not so for you. Never think it. The inheritance of ages does not come for nothing. You are born the heir of your Father's house, and you have to do despite to your own nature if you refuse. You may go to the far

country, but the hungry soul is brought to confess that it is not his own country. In Bunyan's great allegory whenever the pilgrims get out of the way they come to grief, wherever they stray from the path into what looks an easier way it is made hard to them in one way or another. Remember when they went over the stile into the grounds of Doubting Castle the owner whereof was Giant Despair, or when they followed the Flatterer, a man black of flesh but covered with a very light robe, and were entangled in a net. Others may transgress and not feel this particular hardship and difficulty to which we are referring, but not you who have ever walked a pilgrim on the King's highway, not you who have ever seen the vision, not you who have been compassed about with mercy. For you it is solemnly true that the way of transgressors is hard. Before you can do it you have to get over some barriers that should have safeguarded you from danger. It is hard for you to silence the reproving voice of conscience, hard to throttle every high thought and noble instinct, hard to bury the memory of the past, to deny your best nature, hard to forget early education, to forget a mother's prayers, hard to quench the Spirit of God, to blot out the vision of the face of Christ with a look in the eyes that breaks the

heart. It is hard for thee, O human soul, to kick against the pricks. The way of transgressors is hard.

"My son, enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. The way of the wicked is as darkness. But the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

IX

SPIRITUAL APPREHENSION

Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Is he not a speaker of parables?—EZEKIEL XX. 49. R. V.

IN spite of the first partial exile, in which Ezekiel shared, by which the King and nobles and natural leaders of the Jews were deported to Babylon, the great religious lessons which the prophets sought to teach the people were rejected. Both the exiles and those left at home buoyed themselves up with the vain thought that everything would turn out all right; for was not Jerusalem the Holy City still remaining, and were not the tokens of their old nationality still left to them? Ezekiel, who for years had preached the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem and the complete fall and exile of Judah, was disbelieved and despised. He was only an irreconcilable croaker.

Now when at last under the influence of their shallow optimism Judah again rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar set the armed might of his Empire against the rebels. The people still hoped that something would happen

to break the chains which bound hapless Judah, and would make her once more a free independent nation. Ezekiel repeated the judgment of doom, and we can imagine something of the impatience and anger with which he was met by the excited people. When the vision came to him of a complete destruction as of a forest on fire, the terrible conflagration devouring even every green tree, a flaming flame that shall not be quenched, he knew that nobody would believe him, and that they would call it just another effort of the literary artist in him to put his croaking in a new and startling form. He seems to have hesitated to express his vision in the exact manner it came to him. He feels it almost useless to convince them that he spoke the truth of God. Men will pass by his warning with a sneer about himself. He knew they would discount his words, and call it only another trick of his old manner.

One of the burdens of every original teacher and thinker and artist is the feeling that the truth he has to declare seems so dependent on the limitations of his particular mental equipment. He can only utter his message according to the bent of his own individuality. He has his own manner of speech, his own way of expressing himself. And the fear constantly strikes him that his manner may obscure

the truth, and men will pass by the reality, and think of it as only another evidence of what they call his mannerism. Ezekiel seems to have felt this fear. He knows that his way of speaking is in figures, similitudes, parables, and he is fully conscious of the popular objection which his manner created. So, when this appalling vision of the destruction of Jerusalem came to him, he is well aware that the people will discount what he has to say, and will repeat the parrot-cry that it is only another of his strange literary figures.

It is to him a heavy burden that his own peculiarities of mind and method should seem to stand in the way of his message being received. With a cry of anguish he seems to ask to be relieved from the necessity of speaking—but the prophetic fire is in *his* bones also, and will not let him be silent. "Then said I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Is he not a speaker of parables?"

Of course the suggestion in the taunt, which gives it its sting, is that his words are only figures of speech without any reality behind them. The pain of the thought to the prophet is that the people will make the form of his words an excuse for not really listening. The truth he has to declare is unpleasant to them, and they pretend they do not understand, and

ride away on a sneer from even considering them. With cheap sarcasm they shelter behind the assumed difficulty of the words, and pretend they do not understand. It is a popular device, but never so popular as in dealing with matters of religion, and the keenest pain that can come to a preacher is the knowledge that there are some who escape the divine appeal because of some fault or insufficiency in him, that there are some who are offended by his manner of presenting the truth, some even who have excuse for despising the very water of life because of the earthen vessel that brings it.

The experience is not confined to religious teachers. It is the fate of every interpreter of truth, whatever be the medium in which he works; and especially is it the fate of every original thinker. "We mistake men's diseases," says Richard Baxter, "when we think there needeth nothing to cure them of their errors but the evidence of truth. Alas, there are many distempers of mind to be removed before they receive that evidence." One of these distempers certainly is making so much of the personal equation of the man who teaches. Let a man paint much, or write much, or speak much, and people think more of his manner than of what he has to reveal. Their criticisms are almost altogether of his methods;

and many are offended because they do not like his methods.

Wagner, who at least had the zeal of an Apostle, had to hear much of his work dismissed as Wagnerian. Reams and reams have been filled with idle talk about Browning's style. Anything that Carlyle said was discounted as Carlylesque. The charlatan in all the arts is of course vain of such notice, and strives by all dodges to create *outré* effects to command such attention; but the man with even a spark of the prophetic instinct is sick at heart that it should be supposed that he had worked for that, and sick at heart that men should never get past his method of utterance to the living truth he has striven to utter.

But in religion more than in all other regions is this offence disastrous; for the utterance of religious truth asks not for admiration, or approval, or even intellectual agreement, but spiritual assent, the thrill of soul which recognises the truth and bends to its dominion. The offence here is greatest, because in the very nature of the case, unless the truth is spiritually discerned it cannot but appear as a parable, a similitude of words without reality behind it. If it is not welcomed by the very intuition of the soul that hears; if it does not make its appeal directly as truth,

it can have no real meaning, and can be dismissed as idle talk.

Religious truth is not like mathematical propositions, which, if they are accepted at all, must be accepted in the same way. If you accept the definition of a straight line, a straight line must be the same thing practically to all of you, however you may prefer to define it. Two and two as four, if you accept that, are always four, and in the same way to all of you. But spiritual truth is a matter of spiritual interpretation to each soul. The discernment of it is a spiritual thing. Its fulness can only be hinted at by any human words; and all who do not see it and accept it, can look on these words only as parables.

Even apart from revealed truth this is so, in the interpretation of anything that exists. The same thing will appeal differently to different people according to capacity, understanding, experience. One may look on a flower with the eye of a florist, another with the eye of a market-gardener, another of a botanist, another of an artist. Buttercups and daisies may be a nuisance to a farmer, and a delight to a child. Roses may be considered from the commercial standpoint, or the æsthetic, or the spiritual. As with Wordsworth's Peter Bell,

> In vain through every changeful year
> Did Nature lead him as before;
> A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.

To speak of it in any other way would be to speak in parables, meaningless.

If this is so in such things, how much more is the difficulty of finding a common denominator when we speak of the unseen and eternal. Every man who has tried to make plain the things of God knows that his way of speaking will be an offence to some, who will meet his words with blank unintelligence, or with complete misunderstanding, or with a jest of indifference; and all such can enter somewhat into the pain of Ezekiel, when he cried, "Ah Lord God! they say of me, Is he not a speaker of parables?" Our Lord warned His disciples of this, and of the indifference with which the world would receive their message. "Unto you," he said to the inner circle, "it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without all these things are done in parables." Religion can only be a matter of inward apprehension, moral adjustment to the truth, spiritual susceptibility to the religious impression. The distinction between men, involved in our Lord's saying, is not an arbitrary one, but an essential one,

dependent on the state of the heart. This itself is an eternal truth of religion, that it is a question of the heart, a question of holy affections. Christ did not arbitrarily determine that there should be some that were without, whom His words only mystified.

The distinction is a fact of life in all regions intellectual and moral, as well as spiritual. His words were only the occasion which tested men, and divided them into the two classes. We speak of judging truth, but also truth is judging us. By hidden alchemy it discovers whether we are in sympathy with it, whether our life is in unison with it. We are not the standard of truth by which it is measured, Truth is its own standard, and measures us. It is true that we have to judge Christ; but far truer is it that Christ is judging us; our attitude to Him is judging us. When Christ spoke of the effect of His parables, He meant that they acted like sieves sifting out the different kinds of hearers by the influence produced on them. Susceptible minds received the impression. Childlike hearts opened to let Him in. Receptive souls felt His powerful appeal, and quivered in restless eagerness, till they found rest in Him. Some found in Him the way, the truth, the life. Others said of Him, as their fathers said of the

prophets before Him, "Is He not a speaker of parables?"

When the verities of the faith appear to you as mysteries, when the unseen makes no appeal to you, when spiritual truth sounds like an idle tale, when all religion seems like playing with words, when God, and the human soul, the divine Christ, and the life eternal appear to you but figures of speech, with no reality for which they stand, no passion of truth which the words half conceal but also half reveal, if in Gospel and Epistle, in the burning lips and gleaming eyes of men, you do not feel Christ's imperious claims, if you do not see His transcendent beauty, if you do not hear His insistent appeal, what can we say, but that, seeing, you see, and do not perceive, and hearing, you hear, and do not understand?

All spiritual truth must appear as parables to all who do not know the language, to all who cannot recognise the accents of truth even in forms that sound harsh or uncomely to them. The principle of spiritual interpretation is ever the same,—by spiritual discernment. "Know ye not this parable? And how will ye know *all* parables?" asked our Lord. The Christian position is not reached by an intellectual process. It comes to the simple, humble,

responsive heart. To know God gives at least the capacity to recognise the things of God. If you feel like an outsider in the Courts of the Lord, if in the presence of Jesus you feel that you have no relationship to Him, if at the mention of religious truth you feel that you are among those that are without, who care not for these things, or at least understand not these things, do not ride away from the appeal by a cheap sarcasm. Say not, "Is he not a speaker of parables?" as if that absolved you from further concern about it all. Turn to Christ with a heart-pang that your soul should be so seared and hardened. Bend to Christ humbly, and He will unstop the deaf ears and unseal the blind eyes, and give you a heart to understand; for He will take you into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence-chamber of the King, and reveal the Father to you, homeless, fatherless child of His. Christ is His own evidence. He brings conviction with Him. And when He comes the music of His words will touch chords of infinite harmony in your heart. And unto you it will be given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God no longer in parables.

X

CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSY

Speaking the truth in love.—EPHESIANS iv. 15.

ALTHOUGH this is not a controversial Epistle in the sense in which the Epistle to the Galatians is controversial, there is an underlying fear of division and strife being introduced into the Church through the divisive courses of mischief-makers. This unspoken fear makes St. Paul insist on the unity of the faith, the common elements by virtue of which they are Christians. Amid all the diversity of operations in the Church there is one body, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. The different gifts possessed by different members of the Church are all designed for the one sole end, for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying of the body of Christ. The whole Church is meant to be carried forward and upward in the unity of the faith to a higher level of Christian living and Christian character. Christ is the beginning, and Christ is the end. He is the source of the unity, and

He is the fulfilment for which it is designed. We are expected to grow up out of all the immaturity and fickleness of childhood to full-grown men, grow up into Him in all things who is the head, even Christ.

One of the stages of the growth, as it is one of the methods by which the growth is attained, is following truth, or "speaking truth, in love." This is the connection of our text in the sublime passage in which St. Paul speaks of the constitution of the Church. It is quite evident that Paul anticipated controversy and strife in the process of this growth to which he looked forward; for the truth-speaking is set against the evil efforts and cunning craftiness of men who seek to subvert the foundations of their faith in Christ. Against such cunning craftiness they must oppose the truth, which means conflict and controversy. The Apostle's anticipation has been amply realised in the history of the Church.

From one aspect that whole history is a record of strife—and strife among brethren, rival factions, rival doctrines, rival systems of government. It is useless to recall the dead and buried controversies of the past centuries, but every student of Church history knows that not an item of the creed was accepted by the Church without the fiercest quarrels

and the keenest discussions—sometimes even to the drawing of the sword and the shedding of blood. It is not necessary to rake among the embers of burnt-out controversies to establish the truth of Paul's anticipation; for we have among ourselves evidences enough what violent strife and disputation can be caused by religion. Christian Churches are divided on points of doctrine, and points of worship, and points of government; and even within the same Church, as in the Church of England to-day, there are parties arrayed against each other about ritual, and even about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper itself, which is the one thing which ought to unite all Christians. Many of our churches were born in the throes of conflict, and cradled in controversy. Men, following truth, constrained to speak truth, have had to live at variance with brethren, whom they respected, but with whom they could not agree. From one aspect the history of the Church looks like a dreary waste of polemic, and through the Christian centuries we can still hear the jarring discord of endless dissensions. Lord Rosebery in a very beautiful speech at Epsom at the opening of a Church-room referred to a controversy in the English Church at the time, about incense and lights in worship, and said, "Theological discussions are, for some reason

unknown to the layman, conducted with more asperity than any other form of discussion. Why that should be so, why the Gospel that came to preach peace and goodwill in this world should be so often the means of provoking the most violent disputations, is a problem I confess I am unable to solve." It is a problem above us all, but two things may be said, which, though they do not excuse the heat of religious controversy, help to explain it.

One is that there is no subject to religious men so near their heart. It is because the issues are so great, because it is a matter of life and death to them, that they take it so seriously. If they cared less, they could be more dispassioned and cool. It was because Athanasius realised the tremendous import of the creed for which he contended that he was willing to fight on, though it meant Athanasius against the world. It was because religion was everything to Luther and Calvin and John Knox that they dared so much, and suffered so much, and spent their lives in controversy. If they had not had such intense convictions they would not have been so concerned about the purity of religion, and could have let things swing as they hung. There is a fine easy tolerance which many profess, which looks down upon the fever and zeal of others with philo-

sophic scorn, but the tolerance is only another name for indifference. They do not understand why men should wage relentless warfare about certain ecclesiastical issues, because they do not really understand the issues. Even the quarrels in England about incense and lights in worship, which seem so petty put that way, have far-reaching roots in creed, and in the long run will have far-reaching effects on character and conduct. What is at stake to men of insight is not merely the details of incense and lights, but the theory of the ministry as a priesthood, with magical powers over the sacraments, and divine powers over the conscience of members of the Church. This accounts for a little of the asperity of tone and the keenness of the fight. Upholders of truth feel that truth is all-important, and so are compelled to follow truth wherever it leads them.

Another explanation of the sharpness of religious controversy is the very nearness and common standing of the parties. The bitterest disputes in life occur among those who are nearest each other in spirit. You do not quarrel with the man with whom you have little or no communication. It is not the man in the street who chafes your soul, and has power to ruffle your temper. You can afford to despise or neglect him. It is the man of your own household,

with whom you have points of contact. You only make enemies among your friends. This is so in all domains of life as well as in religion. A quarrel between a Democrat and a Republican is never so acute, has not so many barbs and pricks and spines in it as a quarrel between two Democrats. Not the outsider, but the familiar friend who lifts up his heel, has power to hurt. Home-quarrels of all kinds are according to the facts of human nature the bitterest of all; and Church disputes are of the class of home-quarrels.

All this does not excuse the asperity of theological discussion, it only helps to explain it. With all the faults of much religious controversy, its wrongheadedness, its false emphasis on what is accidental and not essential, its forgetfulness of the charity which suffers long and is kind, yet it has often been inspired with sincere zeal for righteousness, and with earnest desire for truth. Truth at every hazard; justice though the heavens fall; against the cunning craftiness of men whereby they lie in wait to deceive, truth is the panoply, speaking the truth fearlessly. Truth has ever a face for the foe, opposing in Bacon's phrase the lie that sinketh in and settleth in the mind and doeth the hurt. There are times when tolerance is sin, when a true man must range himself among

one of two opposing forces. There are times when truth must be defended strenuously, unreservedly; times when neutrality is not wisdom but cowardice; times when the true word must be spoken though thrones shake; when falsehood must be unmasked, and attacked at any and every cost—*except the cost of love.*

When the Apostle adds "in love" to his admonition to follow truth, he is not limiting the idea of truth-speaking; he is really extending it; he is defining what it means. It is here that all the mistakes of religious controversies are made. Men in the stress of the fight get so easily hard, and bitter, and revengeful, and censorious; and even when they are right, the bloom departs from the truth. Truth-speaking is *a manner* as well as a matter. It cannot be divorced from its spirit. Truth-speaking in the Christian sense cannot be done at all without love. The object of it is not to confound and convince men; but to win them. Hard and loveless truth is not truth at all. This is the condemnation of so much controversy. The spirit of it is wrong, sometimes even when the cause is right. Truth is a subtle thing; it enters into the fibre of mind and life. To extend the truth falsely is to lose it. The religion which needs, or receives, support by fagot

and stake is false, or is falsely understood. Truth-speaking must be conditioned by love to save it from the grossest errors. Only love will teach us wisdom in speech, teach us to avoid the excesses and even the brutalities into which partisans are so often hurried. It will save us from the virulence of personal disputes. It will teach us what are the real essentials of religion, and keep us from laying stress on the accidental.

Most of our disputations are beyond the point. So much of it is a matter of wrong emphasis. We put the accent on the wrong syllable, like a foreigner speaking English. To speak a foreign tongue with anything like accuracy we must live among the people, till the language saturates our ear. If we *lived* in the atmosphere of Christ's love, and not merely paid a hasty visit to it now and again, if Christ's love were the climate of our soul, truth-speaking would be our mother-tongue, and we would not make so many mistakes of emphasis. Truth would be bathed in love, till the two became as one. We would see that truth is love, and that without love there is no truth.

This does not mean emptying truth of its force. It would strip much of what passes for truth-speaking of its barbarities; but to truth itself it would give

wings. We are inclined to look upon the fanatic as the type of the truth-speaker, the man of red-hot zeal who splutters forth his ardent rage against men and things he hates. It is because we are so prone to one-sidedness. But true culture in anything is perfect sanity, balance of power, proportional development of the whole man. We need proportional development in the spiritual sphere also—love strengthened and stiffened by truth; truth ennobled and inspired by love. The men who have influenced you, if you think of it, have had both elements in their character. They were men of principle, of strong character, with the wise large vision and the wise large tolerance of a loving heart. John Stuart Blackie, beloved by all who knew him, made this text of ours the motto of his life, and used to write it in its Greek form on every envelope he addressed. It was the key-note of his character, which combined in a way, not common in that grey north country, the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum* with a winsome genial sweetness of soul. It is no weakening of the life to add gentleness to strength. It is only then that strength is perfected. Think how our Master combined in its perfectness both elements; with truth and love the twin passions of His heart, His life clear and bright as the sunlight—and as warm!

If this qualification of love were always made, how much of our truth-speaking on which we pride ourselves would be true? If we thought less of putting others in the wrong, and more of winning them to the right; if we in all our disputings thought less of personal triumph and more of truth, would there be so many conflicts among brethren, after all? We have not learned Christ, if we have not learned something of the love that thinketh no evil, the love that beareth and endureth and hopeth, the love that seeketh not her own, and is not easily provoked.

There comes to us through tradition the pathetic picture of St. John, who had lived through the first fierce struggle of the early Church, with scars of fight on his heart, having drunk to the dregs of the cup of Christ's suffering, too old and frail to preach to the congregation, carried in to say to the Church, "My little children, love one another, for love is of God." When earthly ambitions are balked and disappointed, or when they are fulfilled and the heart is still empty; when the cup of earthly joy is withheld, or when it is given and the soul is still unsatisfied; when the fires of human passion die out; when we look at life steadily and on every side of it; a man comes to see that nothing else counts but this. If we have gained everything and lost this, what have we

gained? How our ambitions wither before the glory of this ideal! How our common aims dwindle and fade in the presence of its serene beauty! How poor and petty seem our selfish schemes, our personal rivalries, our strife of tongues, our self-assertion, and our weary noises! We speak about maintaining the truth, and extending the truth, as if it were a logical proposition, or a mathematical theorem, that we can learn and somehow drum into people's heads. It is a subtler thing than that, elusive to the coarse touch, a spiritual thing to be spiritually discerned. The only means of attaining it is by love: the only medium of propagating it is love. You have not begun to know even the rudiments of Christian truth, till you have opened your heart to Christ's love. And you can do nothing to extend that truth, except through love. Even the statement of truth has social aspects and is judged by its social fruits. Service is the test of Christ in speech as of Christian life.

"Speaking the truth in love, may we grow up in all things into Him who is the head, even Christ."

> Be to other souls
> The cup of strength in some great agony,
> Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,
> Beget the smiles that have no cruelty.

XI

THE ATTRACTION OF THE PRESENT

And Esau said, Behold I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?—GENESIS XXV. 32.

WE cannot suppress a natural sympathy with Esau in this scene between the two brothers. He seems as much sinned against as sinning, and in comparison with the cunning, crafty character of Jacob he appears the better of the two. His very faults lean to virtue's side, we think, as we look at his bold, manly, impulsive figure. There is nothing of the cold calculating selfishness, the astute trickery, the determination to get his pound of flesh, which make his brother appear mean beside him. With our swift and random and surface judgments we are inclined to think it unjust that Esau should be set aside in the great history of grace for one who could be guilty of both malice and fraud in advancing his own interests. We are not at present dealing with the character of Jacob or we would see that this hasty judgment, true so far as it goes, is something

less even than half the truth, and that though he here and elsewhere sinned and was punished through all his life for his subtlety and selfishness, yet he was not the monster of unbrotherly malice merely which this scene might suggest, and that he had qualities of heart and spirit which made it inevitable that he, and not Esau, should be chosen for the line of God's purpose. Our subject is Esau and his weakness and fall in the presence of his overmastering temptation.

Esau's good qualities are very evident, being of the kind easily recognised and easily popular among men, the typical sportsman who is only a sportsman, bold and frank and free and generous, with no intricacies of character, impulsive and capable of magnanimity, the very opposite of the prudent, dexterous, nimble man of affairs, rather reckless indeed and hot-blooded and passionate. His virtues are already, we see, dangerously near to being vices. Being largely a creature of impulse, he was in a crisis the mere plaything of animal passion, ready to satisfy his desire without thought of consequences. Without self-control, without spiritual insight, without capacity even to know what spiritual issues were, judging things by immediate profit and material advantage, there was not in him depth of

nature out of which a really noble character could be cut. This damning lack of self-control comes out in the passage of our text, the transaction of the birthright. Coming from the hunt hungry and faint, he finds Jacob cooking porridge of lentils and asks for it. The sting of ungovernable appetite makes him feel as if he would die if he did not get it. Jacob takes advantage of his brother's appetite and offers to barter his dish of pottage for Esau's birthright.

There would be some superstition in the minds of both of them as to the value of the birthright. Both of them valued it as a vague advantage, carrying with it a religious worth, but it meant nothing tangible; and here was Esau's temptation, terribly strong to a man of his fibre. He was hungry, and before his fierce desire for the food actually before him such a thing as a prospective right of birth seemed an ethereal thing of no real value. If he thought of any spiritual privilege the birthright might be supposed to confer, it was only to dismiss the thought as not worth considering. Spiritual values had not a high place in his standard of things. He could not be unaware of the material advantages the possession of the birthright would one day mean. He must have known that it was something to be

recognised as the eldest son, with special rights of inheritance and precedence and authority after his father's death. These things were real enough to him, even though he might have no notion of a deeper meaning in being the heir of the promise. But in the grip of his appetite even these temporal advantages were too distant to weigh much. In the presence of immediate satisfaction the distant appeared shadowy and unreal and not worth sacrificing present enjoyment for. He feels he is going to die, as a man of his type is always sure he will die if he does not get what he wants when the passion is on him; and supposing he does die, it will be poor consolation that he did not barter this intangible and shadowy blessing of his birthright. "Behold I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?"

The Bible writers speak of Esau always with a certain contempt, and with all our appreciation of his good natural qualities, his courage and frankness and good humour, we cannot help sharing in the contempt. The man who has no self-control, who is swept away by every passion of the moment, whose life is bounded by sense, who has no appreciation of the higher and larger things which call for self-control, that man is after all only a superior sort of ani-

mal, and not always so very superior at that. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls Esau "a profane person who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." "Profane" means not blasphemous, but simply *secular,* a man who is not touched to finer issues, judging things by coarse earthly standards, without spiritual aspiration or insight, feeling every sting of flesh keenly, but with no sting of soul towards God. Bold and manly and generous and with many splendid constitutional virtues he may be, but the man himself lacks susceptibility to the highest motives of life. He is easily bent by every wind of impulse, and is open without defence to animal appetite. He is capable of despising the intangible blessing of such a thing as a birthright, even though he feel it to be a holy thing, because he cannot withstand present need. A profane, a secular person as Esau, is the judgment of the New Testament.

This scene where he surrendered his birthright did not settle the destiny of the two brothers—a compact like this could not stand good for ever, and in some magical way substitute Jacob for Esau in the line of God's great religious purpose. But this scene, though it did not settle their destiny in that sense, revealed their character, the one essential thing

which was necessary for the spiritual succession to Abraham; and Esau failed here in this test as he would fail anywhere. His question to reassure himself, "What profit shall this birthright do to me?" reveals the bent of his life and explains his failure. True self-control means willingness to resign the small for the sake of the great, the present for the sake of the future, the material for the sake of the spiritual, and that is what faith makes possible. Of course Esau did not think he was losing the great by grasping at the small. At the moment the birthright, just because it was distant, appeared insignificant. He had no patience to wait, no faith to believe in the real value of anything that was not material, no self-restraint to keep him from instant surrender to the demand for present gratification.

This is the power of all appeal to passion that it is *present,* with us now, to be had at once. It is clamant, imperious, insistent, demanding to be satiated with what is actually present. It has no use for a far-off good. It wants immediate profit. This is temptation, alluring to the eye, whispering in the ear, plucking by the elbow, offering satisfaction now. Here and now—not hereafter; this thing, that red pottage there,—not an ethereal unsubstantial thing like a birthright. What is the good of it

if we die? and we are like to die if we do not get this gratification the senses demand. In the infatuation of appetite all else seems small in comparison; the birthright is a poor thing compared to the red pottage.

It is the distortion of vision which passion produces, the exaggeration of the present which temptation creates, making the small look like the great, and discrediting the value of the thing lost. The vivid lurid description in the Proverbs of the young man void of understanding snared in the street by the strange woman gives both these elements of the effect of passion, the weak surrender to impulse, and the distortion of vision which blinds to the real value of what is given up for the gratification—"He goeth straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter, till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."

But it is not merely lack of self-control which Esau displays by the question of our text. It is also lack of appreciation of spiritual values. In a vague way he knew that the birthright meant a religious blessing, and in the grip of his temptation that looked to him as purely a sentiment, not to be seriously considered as on a par with a material advantage. The profane man, the secular man, may not be just a

creature of impulse, he may have his impulses in good control, but he has no place for what is unseen. He asks naturally, What shall it profit? Men who judge by the eye, by material returns only, who are frankly secular, think themselves great judges of profit, and they too would not make much of a birthright if it meant only something sentimental as they would call it. The real and not the ideal, the actual and not the visionary, the thing seen and not the thing unseen—they would not hesitate more than Esau over the choice between the pottage and the birthright. They judge by substance, and do not understand about the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

How easy it is for all of us to drift into the class of the profane, the secular, persons as Esau; to have our spiritual sensibility blunted; to lose our appreciation of things unseen; to be so taken up with the means of living that we forget life itself and the things that alone give it security and dignity! How easy, when soul wars with sense, to depreciate everything that is beyond sense, and let the whole moral tone be relaxed! There is much cause for the Apostle to warn us to "Look diligently lest there be among us any profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

We too can despise our birthright, by living far below our privileges, and far below our spiritual opportunities. We have our birthright as sons of God, born to an inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ. We belong by essential nature not to the animal kingdom, but to the Kingdom of Heaven; and when we forget it and live only with reference to the things of sense and time, we are *disinheriting* ourselves as Esau did. The secular temptation strikes a weak spot in all of us, suggesting that the spiritual life, God's love and holiness, the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness, the life of faith and prayer and communion are dim and shadowy things, as in a land that is very far off. "What profit shall this birthright do to me?"

What shall it profit? seems a sane and sensible question, to be considered in a businesslike fashion. It is the right question to ask, but it has a wider scope and another application. What profit the mess of pottage if I lose my birthright? What profit the momentary gratification of even imperious passion if we are resigning our true life, and losing the clear vision and the pure heart? What profit to make only provision for the flesh, if of the flesh we reap but corruption? What profit the easy self-indulgence, if we are bartering peace and love and

holiness and joy? "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world [and not merely a contemptible mess of pottage] and lose his own soul?" What profit if in the insistence of appetite men go like an ox to the slaughter, knowing not that it is for their life? "Thus Esau despised his birthright."

XII

AN UNFINISHED LIFE

I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.
—Psalm cii. 24.

The inscription of this Psalm is unique. It is not like the other inscriptions of the Psalms, with reference to musical instructions or to the supposed author or the historical circumstances of their composition. In this case it describes the inner subject of the Psalm, and makes a very beautiful heading, "A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord." The afflictions are those of the nation and of the Psalmist himself, who added to his own sorrows the sorrow of his people. It seems to have been written towards the close of the exile in Babylon. The author has known sorrow and tears as one of the homeless people, and has shared all the misery that came upon Israel. The keenest pang is that the city of God sits like a widow with her hair in the dust.

It is not possible to disentangle the elements of personal sorrow of which the Psalmist speaks from

this general sorrow which he has with all who loved Zion. The elegy moves with mournful strains as he describes the bitterness of his pain. He has eaten ashes like bread and mingled his drink with weeping. His days are shortened; his strength wasted, and death has crept up close to him, so that he is withered like grass. It seems to him so untimely, so premature that he should be taken; for he is assured that God is about to remember Zion and have mercy upon her. He feels that the deliverance is at hand. God will hear the groaning of the prisoner and regard the prayer of the destitute. The time is near when those who take pleasure in the stones of Zion and love her very dust will have glorious opportunity for rejoicing.

For himself, however, his strength is ebbing out as the expected consummation approaches; and there breaks from him the pathetic cry, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." To have gone through all the pain and tribulation without tasting the ultimate joy, to have borne all the toil and the burden without sharing in the harvest and in the joy of the harvest-home, to have taken part in the long and weary strife and to fall in the hour of victory; that eyes which had seen all the desolation and been salt with tears through many a sorrow

should be closed in death as the new era breaks —that is the dreadful pathos of the situation. It is untimely thus to be balked of the true fruitage of life, to be prematurely cut short ere he has truly lived out his days. We can enter with sympathy into the pitiful prayer, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." He feels his life is unfinished. The winter has come before there has been any autumn. He has sown in tears but not for him to reap in joy.

We, too, have often a similar feeling about what we call unfinished lives and untimely deaths. We have this sense of pathos not for the victor of a hundred fights, but for the soldier who falls in his first campaign; not for the statesman who passes away laden with years and honours, but for the promising novice who was just earning his first laurels; not for the man who can say after a strenuous and long life, "I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course." Pity to him is an insult. He has lived out his life, and done his work, and entered into his rest. It may be hard for those who loved such a man and leant on him for wisdom and direction, but for himself it is a blessed and expected end. We do not feel this pity at the passing away of the old in the fulness of time, rich with the spoils of life, a golden

shock of sheaves for the great harvest-home. The real pathos is the untimely death when the hail-storm cuts the grain unripe and robs it of a harvest, the premature disaster, the unfinished life where the tale has not been fully told but broken off abruptly in the middle. There is little or nothing to show for it all, for the years of preparation, for the training and the planning and the first trial of the practice of life. We feel there has been miscarriage somewhere, a great waste of power. He has been taken away, we feel as the Psalmist felt, not at the end, the natural and destined end, but in the midst of his days, not in the autumn of life but the springtime or the early summer. This tragedy is common enough—the eager brain stilled ere it has done its thinking; the tuneful heart stopped ere it had uttered its melody; the busy hands lying quiet ere they had done their work; the keen eyes closed ere they saw the fruit of all their labour.

We are oppressed with the thought of the irony of human life and of the vanity of human wishes at the sight of all unfinished work, the manuscript with the sentence broken off where the pen fell from the fingers, the picture with here and there a figure only sketched in charcoal, the statue with only suggestions of the beauty that was designed by

it. We sometimes come across buildings in ruins, but not ruins in the ordinary sense; for the buildings have never been finished, a monument sometimes of the folly of men, sometimes of their lack of forethought—like the man in our Lord's parable who began to build a tower without first of all counting the cost. The great undertaking to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Panama cost many millions of pounds and cost many human lives, and then was left, with valuable plant rusting away, and the cut filling in, and the fine harbour silting up. Since the days of the tower of Babel there have been many enterprises of man begun and never completed; and most of them suggest some thought of sadness.

But unfinished work can never be half so sad as unfinished lives. For one thing, a man is not judged by the one work he may have left unfinished. Dickens died with his last manuscript, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,* incomplete; but there is the long roll of his great works to sustain and explain his fame. Michael Angelo left unfinished work, as indeed most artists have done, but we do not think of these when we estimate his work. Even De Lesseps, who made such a colossal failure of the Panama Canal, left the evidence of his engineering skill in his previous work of the Suez Canal. We pass by the

unfinished work to consider the work actually accomplished. But an unfinished life has no such other reference to offer. It stands in all its naked incompleteness, a seeming failure with no complete meaning. It is a crop blighted before the harvest. The Psalmist's cry, when he felt that his life was unfinished and his death would be premature, was a natural cry of anguish, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days."

The pathos of unfinished lives, and how common they are! We do not need to go to literature for illustrations, though they abound there, with a deep sense of the mystery of the providence, as witness Tennyson's *In Memoriam* of his friend Arthur Hallam, and Milton's *Lycidas,* "Young Lycidas, dead ere his prime"—the great mystery which has been so often felt that the bud should become no flower or the flower wither before the time of fruit, while the faded leaf will sometimes hang on the tree of life long past the time of its fall. Untimely we call it, as something opposed to the fit and proper, something unnatural. We feel it to be natural rather that a man should sing out all the melody that is in him, and think out all his thought and work out all his activity; that he should at the end fall on sleep having served his generation, and not be taken away

in the midst of his broken days; that he should sing his own swan-song at the last, as Tennyson did of himself many years after he wrote of Arthur Hallam,

> Sunset and evening star,
> And one clear call for me!
> And may there be no moaning of the bar
> When I put out to sea,
> But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep,
> Too full for sound and foam,
> When that which drew from out the boundless deep
> Turns again home.

This is the meaning of the old petition that God may deliver us from sudden death, not because it is sudden; for that in itself may be a great and crowning mercy. It is a prayer to be delivered from a death that is untimely, premature, unprepared for; saved from the fate of an unfinished life, taken away in the midst of our days.

But in all this natural train of thought we are liable to fall into a great and grievous error. We may have a wrong standard of judgment as to what is a finished life. We mostly think of it as length of days, the telling of a long tale. Bulk and size are our common measure in this as in most things. A long life may be an unfinished life, though it has run out to the last sand undisturbed. It may be unfinished

in all the essentials of true life, without having secured or attained or even once touched man's chief end. It may never have grasped for one moment the real purpose of living, so that to all intents it is cut off in the midst of its days, though the days were as the days of Methuselah. Life is more than mere existence. It may stretch out far beyond the three-score years and ten, but that too is vanity, unless there be more in it than mere length of days. A long life may be an unfinished one in all that makes for real living. Whereas, a short life may be finished in every best sense. Remember, that our Lord, who said at the end, "It is finished," with a depth of meaning that could be applied to no other human life, died a young man. That itself is a lesson and a warning to us when we speak of an untimely death and a premature end. Life may be long, sloping slowly to its natural ending, reaching its full fruition in our eyes, and at last passing to a soft and easy departure like gentle sleep, and yet be after all unfinished. Extent of life empty of moral significance is nothing and less than nothing. And on the other hand can we not enter with some sympathy into the new measure of time which made a Psalmist declare, "A *day* in Thy courts is better than a thousand!"

Human life cannot be judged by its years nor even by its works, but must be judged by its spirit. Not the palpable and outside, such as the years passed or the deeds accomplished, but what is attained through the time and through the deeds, the true set of the character, the bent of the life, the discipline of the heart, the culture of the soul. Sir Thomas Browne in a letter to a friend about a young man who willingly left the world at an age when most men think they may best enjoy it, makes in his own fine way the distinction we are seeking to bring out as to a truly finished and an unfinished life. "He that early arriveth unto the parts and prudence of age is happily old without the uncomfortable attendants of it; and 'tis superfluous to live unto grey hairs when in a precocious temper we anticipate the virtues of them. In brief he cannot be accounted young who outliveth the old man. He that hath early arrived unto the measure of a perfect stature in Christ, hath already fulfilled the prime and longest intention of his being: and one day lived after the perfect rule of piety is to be preferred before sinning immortality."

Early or late, young or old, that is a finished life when the true end of life is apprehended. Truly he cannot be accounted young who outliveth the old

man in him. If a man has learned to love God and obey Him, if he has submitted his will to the will of God, if he has linked his life to the Eternal Life and his love to the Eternal Love, his life is not unfinished, though it seem taken away in the midst of his days. There can be nothing untimely, when his times are in God's hands. Nothing can happen too early or too late. The Psalmist felt this; for immediately after his cry, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days," in the next breath he exclaims, "Thy years are throughout all generations." The thought of God's eternity settles and strengthens him, with the assurance that the Eternal God is his refuge from the frailness and vanity of human life.

That life is finished which knows the love of God, and is ready any day for the angel's Harvest-home. But life out of God, what is it at the best, at the last, but incomplete, unfinished, open at every point to the doom of decay and death, like stubble that blackens on the sodden earth? The end of such life without spiritual contents, without God, is always untimely, always premature. With our unloving hearts and our unfinished lives well may we pray, O our God, take us not away till we have found our true life: take us not away in the midst of our days.

XIII

THE LOVE OF PRAISE

They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
—St. John xii. 43.

"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." That is a broad statement of the result of Christ's work, in spite of the fact that He was enthroned in the hearts of some and received their boundless devotion till death. But when we speak of the failure of Christ's work, we have to do so with many limitations. It could be no failure when He found such passionate response. The hearts of some leapt in a moment to their eyes in glad recognition. Everywhere He made a great impression on men. An enthusiasm that could be called national more than once swept over the country. At times His name was in every one's mouth; and if His claims had been less and His objects more material and political, He would never have wanted for followers. His aims seemed to many to be too impalpable, too unearthly, too far apart from the things of the world, to induce them to throw in their lot with them.

This was especially the case with the upper, ruling classes, who by temperament and training were ever inclined to sit long on the fence about any new movement, and who liked to make sure of the ground before they ventured down on the other side. Among them there was a great deal of half-faith, very akin to doubt. They were accustomed to balance advantages, and could hold feeling in check till they could examine the *pros* and *cons*. This was only human nature as we know it. It was easy for poor Galilean fishermen to let sentiment carry them away without too carefully examining the possible risks. They had not much to lose at the worst; and above all they had not the same difficulty socially. They ran little risk of damaging their reputation and their credit among men. We know what a power for restraint the feeling of society is, and the higher in the scale the more terrorism it seems to have. A fear of ridicule, of loss of esteem, the fear to be set down as a fool, the fear of being singular, all that has great weight with a man in forming his opinions and in shaping his conduct. The fear of social ostracism is a great deterrent in the face of new decisions appealing to be made. A man who has been in the habit of determining his life by the external conscience of his set cannot break away from

the custom of a lifetime. The man who has not been in the habit of settling questions by his sense of duty, by the spiritual appeal they make to him, cannot all of a sudden without great effort begin to do it.

St. John tells us that many of the rulers really believed on Christ in their hearts, but were kept back by some such fear. "Because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue." To be shunned as a social leper, to be excommunicated as a religious heretic, to incur the shame of offending the unwritten but strong rules of their caste—only those who can enter with sympathy into such a case can understand the terrible temptation to be silent and just acquiesce in the verdict of the majority. They naturally feared to lose the good opinion of their fellows, to forfeit the praise of men. It was not so much the fear of actual persecution, as the loss of credit and prestige and that general estimation which men rightly prize so much. A ruler of the Jews risked much who threw in his lot with the despised Teacher of Nazareth. Some of them felt the attraction of Christ's appeal, and were moved to forsake all to follow Him; the beauty of holiness touched them with desire; they lingered wistfully over the thought of it; they half

believed, were almost persuaded to bend to the sweet fascination; the narrow horizon of their petty life seemed to lift and beckon them on to explore its wonders beyond; but as they hesitated and feared, down came the narrowing walls of their spiritual prison, and confined them in the old bondage. The vision of Christ's larger life faded before the worldliness and the false standards of their hearts. Thoughts about reputation, respectability, and all the cramping ideas of their little circle, froze the generous impulse, and killed the growing faith as the rain kills the kindling beacon. "How can ye believe," Christ had asked them on another occasion, "ye, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from the only God?" True faith could not live in such a stifling atmosphere where high thoughts were forbidden. Ambition choked faith. They were too fond of glory from men, and looked upon the praise of men as the highest reward; and so were blinded to the heavenly glory of Christ's life. They sought the esteem of men and could not imagine that God's approval could balance the loss of it. They sought other sources of honour than that of following truth wherever it led them through good or evil report, satisfied to be blessed with a conscience void of offence. Their

condemnation is that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

The praise of men within certain limits is legitimate, though it may be a dangerous motive. Children are taught what they should follow by praise and blame. Even for older people than children to seek to do what will be pleasing to some one we reverence and love may be a very high motive for good. To do praiseworthy things, things that deserve to be commended is quite a recognisable motive in life. The esteem and regard, which we give to beneficent and noble lives, are some of the best prizes of society. The greatest of our public servants get no other reward. To be praised in your work by one who knows what good work is; to have a word of commendation and encouragement in an art from a master of the art—that is worth striving for, and may be, and often is, an inspiration to better work still. If it ends in vainglory and laziness it is evil; but that is only an evidence that the object of it is weak. I am not so sure but that as much work is ruined by cruel criticism as by a generous estimate, and as many young people are spoiled by discouragement as by judicious praise. Envy and detraction and jealousy are too common inmates of men's hearts to make us hard on the gentle company of encourag-

ers. There is too much captious criticism that we can afford to lose the cheerful, hopeful elements. The encouragers of the best sort distribute their kind words not through the insincerity of flattery, but through their fine gift of sympathy. Their friend never did better work than he is doing now, they honestly think and say: their intimates were never more worthy of esteem: their minister never preached a better sermon than his last. There may be a little of the blindness of love in their judgments, but we need some love to sweeten the acrid bitterness of life. Not that it is good for any body of men to be a mutual admiration society, living an enfeebling life of flattery and praise. Still we must see from all the reasons given that, up to a certain point, it is quite a legitimate aim to seek to please others, honourably, and honestly, and sincerely.

If this is so, why should the condemnation of these rulers be merely that they loved the praise of men, and why should all who know anything of the deeps of the human heart and who know anything of the spiritual life fight against this as the enemy of their souls and warn others against it as a deadly danger? "Whoso knoweth himself well," says Thomas à Kempis, "groweth more mean in his own conceit and delighteth not in the praises of men."

Augustine devotes two trenchant chapters of his *Confessions* to this snare of praise. "Our daily furnace is the tongue of men," he groans; for he confesses how his heart loveth praise. He feels how hard the subject is; for he knows that to have the influence for good he desires it is necessary to be loved of men; and he knows that a really good life deserves to be praised, and often is praised, and that it would be absurd for a man to live ill in order to avoid the temptation of being praised.

The explanation of any problem that may be contained in this seeming contradiction is to be found in the region of motive. If praise be a legitimate reward to seek, the question which settles everything is *whose* praise is it you desire, and value, and would like to have; and *is it for the sake of the praise?* Is it to feed self-conceit? The vain man is a glutton of praise. He can take it of any quality: it may be of the grossest sort if only it minister to self-esteem. He will fish for it as keenly as ever angler cast for salmon. And he will take it from any quarter. One of the many satires, touched with genial kindly wisdom, of the great satire of Don Quixote, is the scene where Don Lorenzo, the would-be poet, reads his poems to the poor crazed knight. Don Quixote thinks him the best poet in the world, and says he

deserves to be crowned with laurel. "I need not tell you," says the author, who knew human nature so profoundly, "that Don Lorenzo was mightily pleased to hear Don Quixote praise him, though he believed him to be mad; so bewitching and welcome a thing is adulation, even from those we at other times despise." It is a keen satire, and true to life. Vanity will gulp down with eager relish the most fulsome praise. It does not even ask whether it is worthy of it, and does not ask whether the source of it is such that a truly self-respecting man can drink of it. The praise of the bad is worse than the blame of the good. The praise of some men is almost an insult, and is enough to make one question whether his conduct is really worthy. "They that forsake the law praise the wicked," is one of the sharp thrusts of the Book of Proverbs. Many a man's character is damned by the praise he gets. To get the goodwill of the unthinking, all that is needed is a pliable conscience and a weak will. Only the colourless character can escape without some enmity.

This is the terrible temptation of the love of praise, that it tends to make a man invertebrate, turning towards the easy part. The insatiable desire to be acknowledged, to have your work recognised, to have your self-esteem flattered, has an evil effect on

the whole standard of action. We readily become what will receive praise, what will be accepted, and what will sound well in the mouths of men. It is as debilitating mentally and spiritually, as dram-drinking physically. The constant danger is that we make others our conscience, and ask not what is right, what is well-pleasing to God, what is consistent with rectitude, but what others will say of us. We judge ourselves not by a rigid standard of right, but by the flexible one of fleeting opinion. The weak character cannot stand alone; cannot live out of the sunshine; and withers before the east wind of criticism.

For true living we need a higher standard than the praise of men. To serve God a man must be ready, if need be, to do without the sweet savour of popular acclaim. It is the demagogue, to whom applause is the breath of his nostrils. Here, too, we must learn from our Master, who was unmoved by the plaudits of the mob. He knew what value to put on them. Steadfastly He pursued His course of good, and did not alter His determination to go on with His work, though He knew that the shouts of Hosannah would change to the hoarse cries of rage and hate. Some of this independence of praise or blame, this aloofness of temper, enabling a man to stand firm, is needed in every strong character. All really great men have

had it. To keep a conscience void of offence to God and to men, a man must be willing to dispense with praise, must be willing to suffer, must have some of the stuff of the martyrs in him, like St. Stephen,

> Who heeded not reviling tones,
> Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
> Tho' cursed and scorned, and bruised with stones;
> But looking upward, full of grace.
> He prayed, and from a happy place
> God's glory smote him in the face.

This is the secret of true independence—*the praise of God,* not the praise of men. If we stopped to ask not what men thought of us but what God thinks of us, we would be saved from weak complacency on the one hand, and from bitter loveless pride on the other. For, this independence of which we speak, is not a proud consciousness of right, a self-centred faith which enables a man to dispense with outside help and resent outside interference. Such an attitude hardens a man, and makes him contemptuous. It is not the self-centred life which is the true life; but the God-centred life, which turns to God as the flower turns to the light. The weakness of these rulers was that men were more real to them than God; and naturally they yielded to the strongest influence. But if your heart is fixed on God, if to please Him and do His will is the bent of

your life; though all the world condemn, it is enough that He commends: though it is hard to do without the encouragement of our brethren, it is harder still to do without the smile of our heavenly Father; however desolate it is to stand alone, with Him they that be with us are more than they that be against us: like our blessed Lord, however misunderstood on earth it is enough to be understood in heaven: however reviled by men it is enough to be praised by God. He hides us in the secret of His presence from the pride of man; He keeps us secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

XIV

THE SHAME OF DETECTION

As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed.—JEREMIAH ii. 26.

THE prophet is accusing the nation of apostasy, of unfaithfulness to her true Spouse. To awaken repentance he points to the base ingratitude which could forget the early days of their history when God espoused them, in love and favour brought them up out of the land of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and brought them into a plentiful country. He points next to the wilful and wicked obstinacy which made them forsake God and choose the lower worship and the lower moral practice of heathenism. And here he points to the folly of it. Besides its ingratitude and its wickedness, it is also unspeakably foolish, an insensate stupidity at which the heavens might well be astonished, not only that a nation should change its God, who had taken them by the arms and in endless love and pity taught them to walk, but that it should change Him for *such* other gods—that Israel should have given Jehovah

such pitiful rivals. This is the folly at which the heavens may be amazed, that my people "have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." To a monotheist who had grasped the principle of the One God, and who had experience of spiritual communion, polytheism with its lords many and gods many, must have seemed a system almost beneath contempt. Intellectually it introduced confusion instead of order: morally it meant that life would be lived on a much lower plane: religiously it was the degradation of the pure spiritual worship to which the prophets pointed the people.

This is why the prophets always speak of the *shame* of idolatry. It seemed incredible that men in their senses should prefer what appeared to them to be brutish superstition. Both intellectually and morally it was a disgrace. Especially the prophets of the exile and after it, who had come into close connection with heathen idolatry, had this sense of superiority, and withered the stupidity of polytheism with their most mordant irony. It was shame, at which they blushed, to think of Jews descending to such puerile worship and practices. It was folly for the heathen who knew no better: it was shame for Israelites to grovel before a stock or stone. The

prophets confidently predicted that experience would prove the folly and vanity of idolatry. "They shall be turned back," says the prophet of the exile, "they shall be greatly ashamed that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods." The prophets with their spiritual insight already saw the disgrace and vanity of such worship; but the people, who were seduced by the lower and more sensuous rites of idolatry, would have to learn their folly by bitter experience. When the pinch came, when the needs of life drove them like sheep, when in the face of the great necessities, they would find out how futile had been their faith. "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so the house of Israel will be ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests and their prophets, saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth; but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? Let them arise if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble."

Ah, in the time of trouble they would find out their folly; and the vanity of their trust in idols would be found out. They should feel already the disgrace; but, though they are insensible to that

now, they will yet be convicted and the hot blush of shame will cover them with confusion of face. They are not ashamed of the ingratitude and wickedness and folly of their conduct, but their sin will find them out, and then surely the conviction of their foolishness and guilt will abash them, and then at last they will know the sense of degradation and self-contempt which should be theirs now. "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so the house of Israel will be ashamed."

The same dulness of mind and darkening of heart and obtuseness of conscience can be paralleled among ourselves. Is it not true that in social ethics the unpardonable sin is to be found out? In many cases it is not the thing itself that men fear and condemn and are ashamed of, but anything like exposure of it. There is a keen enough sensibility to disgrace, but not for the thing itself which *is* the disgrace. Men will do things with an easy conscience for which they would be ashamed—if they were found out. Our moral standard of judgment is to a great extent only that of the community. Our conscience is largely a social conscience merely, not individual and personal and vital, but imposed on us by society, a code of manners and rules which we must not transgress. It is no exaggeration to say that we

live more by this code, by the customs and restraints of society, than by the holy law of God as a light to our feet and a lamp to our path. Much of this is good, and represents the accumulated gains of the past, a certain standard of living below which men are not expected to fall, a moral and even a Christian atmosphere which affects us all and which is responsible for much of the good that is in us. One only needs to live for a little in a Pagan community to realise how much we owe to the general Christian standard of our country, such as it is. At the same time we must see how insecure this is as a guard and guide to life.

For one thing, it is bound to be largely an external thing. Society can only take account of what is evident, what is on the outside. It cannot consider motives much or even character, and can only consider actual events that obtrude themselves into notice. It has its standard of respectability and of decency and even of morals, but that standard is bound to be external. A man might have a corrupt heart and be filled with all evil passions, but it stands to reason that society cannot take him to task for that, unless it gets something on which it can lay a finger.

Apart even from such deeper moral depths of character, there may be actual transgressions, but

until they are discovered and proved, society must treat them as if they did not exist. A man might be a thief, not only in desire and heart, but in reality, but until he is found out he rubs shoulders with honest men everywhere as one of themselves. Society is not ashamed of him, and he need not be ashamed of himself. A man may break all the commandments, even the social commandments everywhere recognised, but if there is no exposure nothing outward happens. So that the constant temptation of us all and of society generally is to lay the stress on the outside aspect. Men dread the open exposure of an evil, not the thing itself; they dread the scandal, not the sin; the outward disgrace, not the inward dishonour. According to our necessary social ethics the thief need not be ashamed until he is found out, and unless he is found out.

The subtle temptation of the whole attitude is that we are ever inclined to conform merely to an external set of rules and not to an inward moral or spiritual standard. The first and chief of the social rules becomes not to create a scandal, not to be found out; and so long as there is no *fama clamosa,* no fierce exposure, we can be anything and do anything and live at peace with ourselves and with society. If punishment comes from the transgression of any

moral or social law, the culprit smarts not for the sin, but for the punishment. He is ashamed at last and at first when he is found out. There is nothing necessarily of evangelical repentance in it, nothing healing in the sorrow or the shame, no virtue in the tears. William Secker makes the distinction in quaint fashion, "Pharaoh more lamented the hard strokes that were upon him than the hard heart that was within him. Esau mourned not because he sold his birthright which was his sin, but because he lost the blessing which was his punishment. This is like weeping with an onion; the eye sheds tears because it smarts." It is a proof that we are only living by the most superficial of moral rules when we are more concerned about the punishment than the sin, more concerned about public exposure than about the evil itself. To be ashamed only when found out means a somnolent conscience and an external standard of conduct.

But what a common state this is! What types of false shame regulate our life, like that of the unjust steward who was ashamed to dig, but not ashamed to steal! We need a deeper standard of ethics, a more sensitive conscience, which would make us ashamed of the dishonesty or falsehood or moral cowardice or impurity, not because they happen to

be brought home to us from the outside, not because we are detected by others, but because we have fallen from our own high standard, and have wronged our own true selves, and broken the high and holy law of God written on our own hearts. Till this is so, we are not safe, and have no reliable code of conduct.

The shame of being found out may, of course, induce this better feeling, and be the beginning of a nobler and more stable moral life. It is one of the blessed functions of punishment to offer us this point of departure, as the house of Israel through the shame of idolatry reached a loathing of it that ultimately made it impossible in Israel. Welcome the retribution which brings us self-knowledge: welcome the detection which makes us ashamed and makes us distrust ourselves at last: welcome the punishment which gives repentance of sin: welcome the exposure which finds us out because it makes us at last find out ourselves! All true knowledge is self-knowledge. All true exposure is self-exposure. The true judgment is self-judgment. The true condemnation is when a man captures and tries and condemns himself. Real repentance means shame, the shame of self that he should have permitted himself to fall so far below himself, and have dimmed the radiance of

his own soul. Long after others have forgiven, it may still be hard for a man to forgive himself. Long after others have forgotten, he may still remember. To this sensitive soul, to this vitalised conscience there may be even wounds hidden to all sight but his own sight—and God's. As the thief is ashamed when he is caught, the house of Israel is ashamed, at last not because of the mere exposure, but because of the ingratitude and wickedness and folly that made an exposure possible and necessary. We need to have the law written on our hearts, to conform to that and not to a set of outward social rules: we need to walk not by the consent of men, but by the will of God: we need to see the beauty of Christ's holiness, and then our sin will find us out though no mortal man has found it out.

"As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, so the house of Israel will be ashamed." Shall be—must be! We are only playing with the facts and forces of moral life if we imagine it can be otherwise. Real and ultimate escape from this self-exposure is impossible. There is no secrecy in all the world. "Murder will out" is the old saying, or old superstition if you will. The blood cries from the ground. It will out in some form or other, though not always by the ordinary detective's art. Retribu-

tion is a fact of life, whether it comes as moralists and artists of all ages have depicted or not. Moral life writes itself indelibly on nerves and tissues, colours the blood. It records itself on character. Any day may be the judgment-day, the day of revealing, declaring patently what is and what has been. The geologist by a casual cut in the earth can tell the story of the earth's happenings by the strata that are laid bare, deposit on deposit. The story of our life is not a tale that is told and then done with. It leaves its mark on the soul. It only needs true self-knowledge to let us see it all. It only needs awakened memory to bring it all back. It only needs the fierce light to beat on it to show it up as it was and is. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed and hid that shall not be made known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light, and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops." Ashamed when he is found out! If to be undetected is the only defence, it is to gamble against a certainty. Found out we shall be, as we stand naked in the revealing and self-revealing light.

The recognition of this is the great ethical awakening to a man, teaching him to submit to self-judgment and compelling him to live his life in the open.

XV

A NARROWING LIFE

For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.—Isaiah xxviii. 20.

This chapter is one of the most powerful of the prophecies of Isaiah, characteristic of his magnificent literary qualities, and characteristic of the man himself, with his keen mind and noble heart. It has the knowledge of life, the insight into human nature which made him a great statesman, and the insight into God's will which made him a great prophet. It is full of dialectic skill, argument and sarcasm and epigram; and full of passion, with the line and plummet of judgment and righteousness in it, and swept by an indignant storm of hail that sweeps away the refuge of lies. It begins with a reference to the northern kingdom of Israel, and the fate in store for their luxury and self-indulgence, the drunkards of Ephraim, who have forfeited their rights to exist as a separate nation. Judgment yawns for them, as the first-ripe fig of summer, which a

man looks on, and while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up.

Then coming nearer home, he accuses Judah of the same sin, the same luxury; and for them too will be the same judgment unless they repent. The reference to Ephraim is meant to drive the lesson home to Judah. The great Assyrian power which will swallow up Ephraim like a ripe fig, will be used to be to them also the scourge of God. With incredible levity, they only mock at him, and ask if he thinks them children; and act up to the name which Isaiah hurls at them, "ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem." Their argument is that they are not so simple, so childish, as he seems to think when he presumes to counsel them. They are clever skilful statesmen, and have bargained against all the possible chances of disaster. While he has been preaching, they have been planning and plotting. They have their alliance with Assyria, and have concocted a counter-alliance with Egypt, and mean to play off one against the other. They are clever rulers, and have provided for all the chances. "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us." That is to say, they have now concluded

their treaties by which they need no longer be afraid of disaster. The statesmen at Jerusalem were miserable opportunists, with no fixed principles, no consistent policy, dreaming that they can make up for the weakness at home by moves and counter-moves on the political chessboard. They put their trust on secret alliances and underhand intrigues.

Over against this Isaiah places the true policy, which accepts the facts of the situation, the present overpowering strength of Assyria, and which believes in the future of Israel, and therefore devotes all energies quietly to strengthening the life of the nation. Let them put away the sin and luxury and drunkenness which are eating out the heart of the people; and let them put away their trivial diplomatic schemes and opportunist intrigues. Let them rely upon God. Let them think upon justice and righteousness and obedience to the moral laws of life. They will save themselves from the fever of intrigue and from the ruin which inevitably must result from their policy. He presents to them instead the calm policy of faith, faith in God's purpose with them, if only they will be true. "He that believeth shall not make haste."

In support of this argument, Isaiah uses the proverbial expression of our text to suggest the futility

of their political schemes to bring peace. Their opportunism is not sufficient: it will fail to satisfy the needs of the situation. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." The proverb carries a suggestion of the very opposite of peace—discomfort, unrest, ever hampered and confined; a distorted, cramped, fretful life. As opposed to the faith which brings calmness and peace of heart, their lack of faith, seen in the sinful indulgence at home and the foolish diplomacy abroad, is a totally inadequate support for men or nations. There can never be true peace on the terms dreamed of by the scornful men who ruled this people in Jerusalem. Peace is not got by making covenants with death and agreements with hell. There can never be peace to men who make lies their refuge, and who hide themselves under falsehood. He that believeth shall not make haste. He that believeth alone can know peace. The other way is the way of unrest, and alarm, and fever, and constant dispeace. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it."

It is still true, as in these old days, that the lack of faith means the narrowing of life. Without faith there is no sufficient support for life. Without faith

there is no chance of peace. It is still the true policy; all else are but painful makeshifts, leaving life cramped and fevered and bare, stretched on a narrow rack. Faith alone provides a sphere large enough for our powers and our needs. The logic of events proved Isaiah to be right when he assured Judah of this. And it is true to-day, as in Isaiah's time, that the only safe national policy must be based on religion. If the desire to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly before God has died out of our heart as a people, if we are concerned only about our dignity or our trade, then we shall lose both our dignity and our trade. If the passion for pleasure rules our life in our cities, if we work only for gain, and seek gain only for luxury and self-indulgence, then our crown of pride, like that of the drunkard of Ephraim, shall be trodden under foot. When the eye of a people grows dim, and sees no visions of truth and right, then the sceptre falls from the nerveless hand.

If we think to stay the plague at the heart by skilful diplomacy, and the tricks of the political trade, tricks as old and as threadbare as the days of these scornful men that ruled in Jerusalem, it is but a bolstering up a rotten substance, and a breath of God's North Wind will crumble it to dust. To every

building of state that man builds, the line of judgment and plummet of righteousness must be laid; and his work must be tried by the storm of hail that sweeps away the refuge of lies. It may not be to-day, nor to-morrow: it may be slow of coming, but it is none the less sure. There is no permanence, no stability, no real prosperity, no true peace for a people except in sincerity of faith and righteousness of life. Have we no cause to take home the Prophet's message to ourselves, when we know that the dreadful picture of the drunkards of Ephraim is a true picture of much that goes on in our midst, when the lust for gold and the quest for pleasure are such imperious motives among ourselves? Authorities lament to us the weedy specimens of manhood bred in our cities, and make all sort of peddling suggestions, many of them good enough in their own small way. The *physique* is more dependent on the *morale* than most of us are willing to admit. We need something more than mere palliatives. The cause must be adequate to the effect desired. We need to go deep to the roots of the evils of our civilization.

Ultimately, nothing but a truer religion, a stronger faith in God, a more resolute determination to do His will, can bring new life and strength to a nation.

"The people that know their God shall be strong and do exploits." Sinful self-indulgence impairs the judgment, distorts the vision, as well as weakens the bodily powers. Isaiah who saw this knew that the only hope for Judah lay in turning to God. He, the Lord of Hosts, is for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle at the gates. And no diplomatic moves, no devices of government, no schemes of alliances affect the essential features of the problem. Is France inherently stronger because of the alliance with Russia? Isaiah knew that the alliance with Assyria and the secret intrigues with Egypt, instead of really strengthening Judah, only weakened her, and made her trust to a bruised reed. It was an uneasy bed on which Judah lay, with no prospect of true peace, too short for a man to stretch himself on, and covering too narrow to wrap himself in. A painful makeshift, instead of the policy of faith, based on moral principles, bringing strength, and courage, and self-reliant, because God-reliant, hope.

In our individual life also we find the narrowing of life through lack of faith. Religion does not mean the weakening and impoverishment of life. Rather it brings an expansion of powers, and broadening of opportunities. Religion enlarges, because it

inspires. It widens the horizon, and opens up life, and leads a man out to a large place. The end which faith sets before itself is not a broken, wounded life, but fulness of life, true life for the first time, life so large and full that it can be called even here eternal life. We are deceived about this because we look so much on the externals. We see religion making a man give up this and that, curtail here and there, sometimes even cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye, that we are inclined to think that religion means shrinkage, the attenuation of life. But faith can dispense with much of the outward in life, just because it enriches the inward. It deepens and enlarges the real life, and brings ever the joy of expansion. To be open on the side of God, to be responsive to spiritual influences, is to have unclosed to ourselves a larger and ever larger world of thought and feeling and aspiration. "What was a speck expands into a star."

Historically, Christ's faith brought this expansion to the world. It lifted the life of man forward with a great impulse. To the most degraded of men it brought undreamt of possibilities. It ennobled life to souls in the narrowest surroundings. It made a slave a free spiritual being, leading him out in spite of his serfdom into a large place. It changed the

face of the world, revived the outworn pagan life, making all things new. It is so still to every man who opens his heart to God. The narrow lot of man is broadened by God; and in such communion there is always the potency of continual expansion. Faith introduces a new motive power, which alters the standpoint of life, which changes the current of life. In spite of all appearances of curtailment, this enlargement is a fact of experience, as all who have bent to the strait gate know. Our faith comes as a great motive power, driving the life to large ends. The consciousness of God changes the world to a man. The knowledge of a personal love brings strength. The Christian faith touches the heart with love, and so gives the life a new buoyancy, and an exultant sense of victory. Duty is ennobled by the new spirit in which it is faced. The things done may be just the petty details of living, or even be irksome in themselves, but they are glorified by being done for love. St. Paul could say, not as a glowing piece of rhetoric, but a plain fact of life, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." And faith brings peace, because it satisfies the heart of man. When a man knows the love of God, he feels that it was for this he was born. His spiritual being has at last an adequate support. The old un-

rest and sense of failure pass away; for the soul comes into its kingdom.

But to live without faith, with no contact with the spiritual world, with no communion with heavenly things, is to have life hopelessly narrowed. It shuts in the natural powers, and dwarfs the spirit. There are only the two ways of it—to build your life on a material basis, or on a spiritual. We have seen how the spiritual gives an inspiring motive, and a calm assurance. To try to fill the insatiable heart of man with the things of sense alone is to try to fill a sieve with water. If no provision is made for the spiritual, it can only be a poor narrow, wizened life, even in the fattest of fat valleys. Woe to the crown of pride which has no other ground of assurance than that of the drunkards of Ephraim.

All earthly satisfaction must be from its very nature but as a fading flower. And the peace of which the prophet speaks is a peace that the world cannot give, as it is a peace that the world cannot take away. If we are shutting our hearts to God, and quenching His spirit, and rejecting His Christ, if we are building on the shifting sand of time and sense, if we have no communion with the eternal, no prayer, no life of the spirit, if with all our getting we get nothing but what is material and temporal, we

are in penury and distress, and are robbing ourselves of our only hope of peace. Be it what it may, with satiated desire, gratified ambition, intellectual attainment, it is a cramped and narrow life, with already the gnawing of the worm in it. Man is of bigger mould than any materialist view of life can match. It does not give you scope for your true and full powers. There cannot be even a semblance of peace except by atrophy of soul. Any form of materialism, gild it never so cunningly, brings man to a sphere too small for him. You are built on a larger plan, and the fever of unrest, the pain of a cramped life, must consume the heart which is not fixed on God. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.

> **And each will have one anguish—his own soul,**
> **Which perishes of cold.**

XVI

A FALSE STANDARD

But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously with me.—Hosea vi. 7.

With the possible exception of Jeremiah, there is no prophecy which shows such a personal note as Hosea's, a note of tenderness which pleads tirelessly for God. He was a man of fine sensitiveness of nature, which was the source of his keenest pangs. He lived at the time when the northern country of Israel, which he loved so passionately, was drifting to its doom through the folly of rulers and the sin of all the people. As a preacher of righteousness he makes the strong indictment demanded by the facts, laying bare the terrible evils of the time: the gross superstition which passed for religion, the consequent corruption of life, the social crimes which were sapping the moral foundations of the nation, perjury, murder, theft, adultery. But it is not as a mere moralist that the denunciation is made, as if he were content to prove intellectually the inevitable connection be-

tween the moral disorder and the political decay of the nation. It is a burden on his heart almost too heavy to bear. He could not have borne it but for the revelation he had of the forgiving love of God. God led him to a wide vision of his redemptive purpose, and gave him the key to the pain of his own life and to the mystery of providence in the sad history of Israel. There is a melting, moving tone in all his pleading, and ever and anon a cry of anguish breaks out in spite of his self-mastery; for while the vision of God's love brings him comfort, it also adds a sting to the thought that the people of God should wantonly trample upon that love. Yet that is his only hope, the thing that kept him from despair, namely, that above the sacredness of law there is the sacredness of love, above the eternal righteousness of God there is His eternal love. So that in the strongest appeal to conscience there ever is felt the appeal to the heart, as in the beautiful lyric of repentance which precedes our text, "Come, let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn and He will heal us; He hath smitten and He will bind us up. . . . He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth."

But Hosea was not privileged to see a true response to his appeal. There was not moral depth

enough in their hearts for them to have anything but a facile and evanescent repentance, born of emotion and withered at the first temptation as the fleeting mist is withered by the rising sun. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." They disappointed all the prophet's loving and wistful expectation for them; and belied their own providential history as a nation; and betrayed the gracious covenant which God had made with them. They were no better than the very heathen round about them, no better than others who had not had their privileges and opportunities. Instead of loving and obeying and serving God, they lived as if they had never stood in a special relation towards Him. "They like men have transgressed the covenant."

In the Old Testament the idea of covenant colours the whole history. Pious Jews, looking back, interpreted the past of their race by this great thought. They were the children of the promise and the promise was the gracious relationship into which God entered with the people of Israel. From what has been said of Hosea's prophecies, we can see that it did not mean any legal agreement, a formal bargain; and still less could it give ground for arrogance and pre-

sumption. To him it was a figure of speech by which he expressed his interpretation of the spiritual history of Israel, stating the terms of love in which God stood towards them, and on the other side the moral obligations that lay upon them in view of that gracious attitude. Israel's privilege meant Israel's duty. The covenant was broken when they ceased to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with God. They put themselves out of that sweet relationship, wilfully robbed themselves of the promise, when they did not perform their part of the loving contract. They took the rank and place of other men. "They like men trangressed the covenant."

Thus these words are more than an assertion of universal human fallibility, more than saying that it is human to err, like men to transgress. It is the assertion of a higher standard for Israel. Israel had special privileges, peculiar opportunities, and was charged with a mission. To fail, to be after all only like other men, was to come under heavier condemnation. They should not be like men, like the rest of the world. It is no excuse to them that they are just like others. If they are not better than others, they are worse; for they have sinned against clearer light, and sinned against special love. Their

degradation is deeper far than even that of the heathen. To ordinary sin they have added the sin of apostasy. It is treachery against the gracious God, an insult thrown in the very face of Love. "Like men they have transgressed the covenant: they have dealt treacherously against me."

The principle of this greater condemnation is a common one, and works out in every relationship of life. Every step of progress sets a new standard; and men are judged not by what they have passed on the way, but by what they have attained. The Christian conscience of our time and country is our standard, not the pagan conscience of a past time or of a heathen land. Every advance is a fresh obligation. New knowledge is new duty. New light is new responsibility. A privilege is also a penalty. Israel cannot be as the heathen, cannot be like other men, without greater sin than even theirs; for Israel has had clearer knowledge and higher privilege. The law is invariable, and reasonable. "To him that hath is given." To him that finishes a task is set a new burden. The more you do, the more you get to do. The higher you rise, the higher rises the standard of judgment. Do you complain? Nay, it is the reward of efficiency. In business the capable man is not laid on the shelf as a reward for his

capacity. He is promoted, advanced to harder and more responsible positions. It is the practice of life; and we recognise the principle in every sphere.

There is, however, a constant tendency to level down the standard, and to be content with just what is expected by the mass. It was against this tendency that the prophets ever had to strive. Israel was always tempted to give up being a peculiar people in this sense of having special moral responsibility. Every gain, physical and moral, is held by effort, by continual conflict with that from which it rises. The lower form of worship and the lower type of life of the nations round about them had many attractions. The surrounding influence was like an all-embracing atmosphere from which they could not shake themselves. The higher religion with its sterner, simpler rites, with its great moral claims on life, was ever menaced by the surrounding idolatries with their appeal to sense, and their laxer standard. There was always a heathen party in Israel, even in her most faithful days, a party ever ready to take advantage of every weakening of the religious conscience and ever making a strong appeal to the lower instincts of the nation. Why should they alone attempt the impossible? Why should they be bound

to a covenant so severe? Why not be like the men of the place, like the men around them, who get on very well and have a happier time where less is expected of them? The strongest count in Hosea's indictment against them, that "they like men transgressed the covenant," was also the strongest temptation.

It is the common temptation still to accommodate oneself to environment. We excuse ourselves that we are just like men when we transgress the covenant, the covenant which our own hearts acknowledge. We are only doing as others; and we are no worse than others if we are no better. We know the weak spot in our defence where this temptation finds us and draws blood. We know from sad experience how easy it is to slip down to lower levels and content ourselves with the attainments and the conduct expected by society. And we do not need to look far for encouragement. The men who will sneer at you for being a "saint" will admire you for being what they call a man of the world. You will get plenty of help in being like others, and plenty of hindrance in attempting the exceptional or uncommon. It needs a staunch heart and a consecrated will to resist the worldly influences to be as the men of the place. Count Zinzendorf, when sent to make the

grand tour to finish his education, wrote before he set out, "If the object of my being sent to France is to make me a man of the world, I declare that this is money thrown away; for God will in His goodness preserve in me the desire to live only for Jesus Christ." His friends did not want him to be unlike men, in the absorbing passion for Christ he had even as a boy, which afterwards produced the great missionary zeal of the Moravian Church. They would rather he had gone to Paris, and did as others did, and come back to be like his set, as we say. It is of a piece with the other worldly wisdom that we should do at Rome as the Romans do, which has of course a surface truth, but which has often served an evil purpose. To accommodate oneself to environment in thought and conduct, to do at Rome as Romans do, to adopt the common tone, only careful to avoid singularity, means in practice the choice of the lower part. Evil is none the less evil, though we follow a multitude to do it. The covenant is transgressed, and the penalty of transgression is ours, though it be like men to transgress. There can be little moral backbone in a character without a certain independence, forming judgments and making decisions and regulating life according to conscience and not according to outside opinion. A man may

succeed in being like men without any initiative of his own and without any development of his own character.

In addition to this outside pressure of a low worldly standard, another subtle encouragement to reduce the level of conduct is due to a disillusionment which comes regarding others, sometimes in men we have admired and looked up to. We find out their limitations, and are often disappointed in them. We find they are like men, hampered by the same weakness, liable to the same temptations, overtaken by the same faults. We take a low estimate of human nature, and bring down our own standard of duty to suit it. Men are all alike, we say in our mood of pessimism, and I may as well be like them: Why should I be different? Why strive to attain the unattainable? You know the temptation, and you know how and where it touches yourself, the temptation to say in some form or other, I do not pretend to be better than my neighbours; I do not set myself up as on a higher platform. Perhaps it is in some business point about which you once had searchings of heart, some doubtful practice which you now condone as merely the custom of the trade. Or it may be some social evil which you join in and call the ways of your set, the habits of your circle,

and it would be puritanic of you to object. You are only doing what others do.

On such reasoning there could be no progress at all. There would be no stainless peaks on earth; only a dreary level. This is true in every region of man's activity. On the same principle why should a man seek truth and pursue it earnestly? Why should he ever oppose the prejudices of the crowd in science or philosophy, in art or literature? Can he not content himself with the knowledge and attainments that are common, and be like men?

So in the moral world we could argue a defence of anything by finding companions, sink we as low as we might. There is no devilish practice, no foul habit, no cruel selfishness, which might not be condoned. We could excuse "the vilest things beneath the moon" to which "for poor ease sake we give away our heart." We have not come to our kingdom as men till we have got past the merely social conscience, the outside standard of others, and have within ourselves a measure of right and wrong, and are parties to a personal covenant in which we stand to God. Only this spiritual fellowship will save a man from the spirit of the world around, which eats like an acid into his highest ideals.

In practice it comes to be simply this as the prac-

tical rule of life, that we who have stood in the new covenant through Christ are called not to do and be like men, but to do and be like Jesus the Son of Man, who has given us an Example that we should follow in His steps. He henceforth represents man to us as well as God. Whatever dishonours Him dishonours our own soul. Whatever is unworthy of Him is unworthy of us. Whatever is unlike Him in mind and spirit is also unlike our own true selves. His very presence in our sinful world is an eternal protest against the low creed which would disinherit us from our divine portion, which would link us to all beneath us and break the links with all above us. To see the beauty of His holiness; to see Him full of grace and truth, and behold the glory of the Son of Man, is to know once for all our true place in the universe of God, and to know that we are called to walk worthy of our great vocation.

Not in presumption, as if we had attained or were already perfect, and may idly sun ourselves in the divine favour. The more we are thrilled with the passion of God's love, the less likely are we to forget that we are "like men," in their weakness and need. We will feel that in every temptation we need the reinforcement of God. We are never without need of His pity and love. Like very children

we need a Father's hand over rough places. We are never without need of forgiveness. "Like men we have transgressed the covenant" all the more basely because it is a covenant of grace.

Nay, unlike men, unlike what men should be and do. "So ignorant was I, I was as a beast before Thee." Like silly sheep who stray in stupid wantonness, "All we like sheep have gone astray." And ever we move to the music of Hosea's sweet lyric of repentance, "Come let us return to the Lord our God. He shall come unto us as the rain that watereth the earth."

XVII

THE FRIENDSHIPS OF PAUL

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother.—2 CORINTHIANS ii. 13.

I DESIRE to speak of an aspect of St. Paul's life and character not often noticed, his friendships, his relation to those who were in the inner circle of his associates. This does not lie on the surface either of the record of his deeds or on the surface of his letters, but has to be gathered little by little from stray remarks and casual incidents. That this should be so is to be expected from the nature of the materials at our disposal, which are the Acts of the Apostles dealing with the amazing spread of the Church as a record of events, and the Epistles, which as a rule were not personal letters but addressed to a community and dealing therefore with general subjects interesting to the Church at large. At the same time a man of Paul's temperament could not escape from giving us evidences of his depth of feeling for in-

dividuals; and so we find him revealed in his letters, as we would never have known him from his accomplished works. If we were confined to the record of the Acts for knowledge of his personality we would have gathered much from what he was enabled to do, his tireless energy, his magnificent success in building up the Church of Christ. Here and there we would have had a glimpse into his heart through one or other of his speeches, such as the affecting address to the elders of Ephesus, when he had to tell them he was going to Jerusalem not knowing the things that would befall him there. We would see his mingled courage and fine sensibility and deep and tender affection for the men with whom he had laboured. We only need to read that speech with sympathy to understand why at its close they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more. But we could not get much insight into the deep world of feeling within the man merely from the history of all his labours and journeys, related largely as they had to be from the outside.

In his letters, however, though they were not personal letters in our sense of the word, ever and again there is a rift and we see into his heart. If we read with care and sympathy we gradually piece together

features that let us see in some completeness the human character of the writer. At present I do not speak of the many qualities which are so traced—the strength and delicacy of feeling, the fearless independence of mind, the unselfishness, the passion of zeal, the great grasp of intellect, and such like, for which one could find many illustrations. Our subject rather is the need he shows for human intercourse and help, the relations in which he stood towards his intimate friends.

This is somewhat different from his relations with the different Churches he founded, the group of converts he made at every step in his great missionary journeys. In a sense the two subjects are alike at least in this that Paul always gave more to others than he ever needed to receive, which is the privilege of the strong and the gifted. Alike to his most intimate friends, and to the great mass of Christian converts the Apostle was as one who served, who stood as master and teacher and adviser and ruler. He was so easily first in his magnificent qualities of brain and heart and soul, that it seems absurd to speak of any mutual relation. All his converts were beloved friends towards whom he had the tenderest feelings, and his letters abound in instances of courtesy and sweet thoughtfulness and tender appeal

to affection. Read the Epistle to the Philippians, which is one of the noblest and sweetest love-letters ever written, full of loving reminiscences and affectionate touches, addressing them in endearing terms, "my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown," and you will realise what a pastor's heart Paul had. In a very true sense he was the friend of all the Churches, and looked upon all who named the name of Jesus as his friends.

But like other men he had human needs for the closer intimacies, the need for an intercourse nearer than even that close tie. And there is for us all a great and useful lesson in this. We can put a man like St. Paul so far from us in our contemplation of his virtues that he ceases to really influence us except as something to wonder at. We can think of him as so unapproachable, and look at his goodness as like the sunlight that strikes upon the stainless peaks, that his example has for us no real inspiration. This is a distinct danger when we realise what things there were in his life which divide him from his commonplace brethren. His untiring energy, his greatness of soul, his superiority to the things that tempt other men, the loftiness of mind which raised him above jealousies and envyings, the unselfishness of life which makes us feel poor and mean beside him, all

the phenomenal qualities that constituted his greatness, all tend to isolate him from our level. He rises more than once almost above the high-water mark of human nature, as when he says with such fervid sincerity, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake." He seemed to forget that he was a man when, in the passion of a wondrous love, he counted all things for which other men strove as dross. He seemed above human frailty and human passion. God knows how small we men feel beside such a man, who had won his sainthood with blood.

It is good for us, then, to note the common grounds of his life with ours, not that the idol has feet of clay as mean natures love to remark, but that he never posed as an idol at all, that he was human in his every need. It is good to note the times when Paul comes near us and opens his heart; for it may be that the inspiring thought may grip us with that quick intensity which cuts the breath that even we may in our measure become like him. He hungered for the help and sympathy of his friends, and felt desolate and helpless when he was deprived of them. More than once he lets us see that he was cast down and needed to be comforted by the coming of a friend like Titus. Our text is a case in point. He had gone to Troas

expecting to meet there a fellow-worker, and his disappointment made him almost powerless, "I had no rest in my spirit because I found not Titus my brother." It would need a sermon for each to trace the relationship in which Paul stood to Timothy, to Titus, to Luke the beloved physician, to Barnabas.

There is this to be noticed first of all about all these friendships, that it was not merely a relation of master and disciples. It was that in many cases and added a new and sweet bond between them. But he also seemed to lean on them for sympathy and help, as for example Titus, of whom he says, "When we were come into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side, nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Or again he writes to Timothy with a tone of pleading in the words, "Do thy diligence to come unto me shortly; for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world; Crescens hath gone to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia, only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." He was not afraid to let his comrades know how much he leant on them and prized their faithfulness; he never tried to pose as self-contained as smaller men do. He was not afraid to let his friends

know how he loved them, and never grudged praise to his associates.

What a generous, large-hearted friend Paul was! He hardly ever mentions one of his fellow-workers without an endearing epithet, such as "My beloved," or "our sister," or "our labourers in the Lord," or as with Timothy, "my dearly beloved son." No wonder he received such devoted love, and found men who would willingly have faced death for one look of commendation from him. Though he was one of the best-hated of men, he was also one of the best loved. Read the last chapter of Romans with its beautiful salutations, and you realise how Paul was blessed with friends. There is a chapter in every epithet, a chapter of his heart, as this one, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother—and mine." What an unrecorded chapter these words hint at, when the mother of Rufus succoured the wandering Apostle, it may be nursed him in some sore sickness, so that she was to him ever after "the mother of Rufus—and my mother too."

I wish I could go over in detail all these references scattered through Paul's letters which illustrate this aspect of his great character. We would be struck with their complete appreciation of the good qualities

of his friends, the generous gratitude he offered, the noble praise. Take just one other which also has a chapter of incident in it—when he speaks of Priscilla and her husband Aquila and calls them "my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own necks." As I went over the Epistles to note all the references, sometimes to nameless names embalmed in the New Testament by Paul's love, I did not know whether I was more affected by the humble, loyal, and faithful service of so many who are just names to us, or by the great-hearted Apostle who loved to speak of them in his generous pride of them. There have been many sermons preached about Paul's genius for statecraft, his genius for Church government, his genius for theology; but I do not remember ever hearing of a sermon on Paul's genius for friendship; and yet is it not so? It would be to tell his noble life's story to adequately treat this subject; for all his work is associated with some evidence of friends. Think of his gratitude to Luke the beloved physician; his tender care like a mother's for Timothy's health, the delicacy of his appeal to Philemon, whom he feels he might well have commanded, "yet for love's sake I rather beseech you, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."

Of course we know there must have been great personal magnetism in Paul which gave him easy hold of men, but all his friends were tried by fire afterwards, and though some failed him as Demas, and the ranks were thinned by the loss of all fair-weather friends, yet the tie that bound them was stronger far than any mere personal attraction. This has to be said about all Paul's friendships that they were conditioned by his work. They were not idle gossips and dilettante companions, who had some opinions and tastes in common. He for one had no time and no heart for the comradeship that meant nothing but a graceful adornment of life. His friends were all fellow-workers, all in sympathy with the great object for which he lived. Their relationship went down to bed-rock, and they could not be moved so long as each remained true. The first requisite for Paul was sympathy with the great work he had in hand. This seemed sometimes to make him a little hard and relentless, as when he refused to take Mark on the second missionary tour because he had turned back in the first journey and went not with them to the work. Paul with his eager impetuous nature, unable to understand vacillation and almost contemptuous of weakness, would not lean any more on such a broken reed. He preferred to

separate altogether from Barnabas rather than let the craven Mark come with them. But when the young man proved himself true and staunch, he seems to have won Paul's admiration and love. The warm-hearted Apostle from his references afterwards seems almost eager to make up to Mark for his former poor opinion of him.

It was not exclusiveness which made Paul limit his comradeship to those who were like-minded. It was essential for the great work to which he bent every thought and energy. If a man had no interest in Christ, and in the extension of the Kingdom of God, he could be no fit friend for Paul. If a man turned back from the large venture for the world, as Demas did in the hour of trial, it was a stab to Paul's heart and to that love which lay deepest in Paul's heart. To him it would be as a treachery to his Lord, and friendship under these circumstances could only be a name. This is not due to any tone of hardness in Paul's mind, a narrowness which made him sacrifice any one who could not see eye to eye with him. For, after all, it is the one essential condition of all true friendship.

The only permanent relationship among men is a spiritual one. It does not mean thinking alike, and being alike in temperament and capacity, but it must

mean some community in the things of the soul. If men never plumb the deepest parts of their nature they cannot really know each other. No relationship founded on physical contiguity or on intellectual tastes can from the very nature of the case be lasting. There can be no permanent basis of deep agreement except in spiritual community. If another has no sympathy with us in our highest thoughts and noblest passions and holiest aspirations, it is only desecrating the fine word to speak of friendship. It may be partnership, or intercourse more or less pleasant, but it cannot be *fellowship*. If Paul goes on to his great service pouring out his noble heart for high ends, and Demas loves this present world, what can it be but separation? The only permanent relationship is one of spiritual community: the only permanent severance of hearts is lack of that community. Be not unequally yoked, is a solemn word. Unless men love the same love, and are in sympathy in the high things of the soul, it can only be a form of friendship denying the power of it.

For Demas or any other to have had the chance of friendship with Paul, and to have bartered it away for some poor pittance of worldly good, is a tragedy. Perhaps he did not realise of how much worth it was to gain a smile from Paul, until he lost the chance

of doing it. All that he would gain from his desertion, however much it brought him, was a poor exchange for the days and nights with Paul, and the fellowship of the faith of Christ, and a share in the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. It was more than Paul's friendship that Demas lost.

If you want to have noble friends, you must be willing to be noble. If you want to be bound in ties stronger than the tie of blood, you must meet together in the inner sanctuary, you must in the largest sense of the word make your friends in Christ.

XVIII

THE REPROOF OF LIFE

The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.—PROVERBS xv. 31.

THE great subject of this Book of Proverbs is Wisdom. The teaching of it, so varied, so seemingly disconnected, can yet be summed up in that one word. Judged from one standpoint, the Book is not on the highest levels of the Bible, like the sublime poetry of a Psalmist or the passionate pleading of a prophet. But the Bible is for life, and life has many sides and many open doors. In many cases indeed, the wisdom inculcated here may almost be called worldly-wisdom, shrewd advice about the conduct of life, sarcasm, caustic satire of the follies of men, astute counsel, sometimes genial, sometimes cynical, about the ways of cities. It deals largely with the wisdom of experience, observation, common sense, the intelligent understanding of the facts of life which we call mother-wit. There is an acute discernment of human nature in its weakness as well as its strength, and such a profound sagacity in the

management of affairs, that the Book appeals to some minds as poetry and prophecy do not. And though the counsel is so often prudential, making its appeal to observation such as the man in the street can verify, there is everywhere a keen ethical insight, laying bare the moral facts of life on which indeed all life rests.

It is natural in such a Book which makes wisdom its subject-matter, that much should be said about the way of receiving instruction. Life is a business which men have to get through if possible decently and well, and so they have to learn the proper ways of conducting the business. There is a training in it, a necessary education, things that must be found out somehow if failure is to be avoided. The young man especially who is beginning this business of life needs to be willing to learn, to listen humbly to warning and advice. Of course, life will teach its own lessons by its own method of encouragement and punishment, but the discipline in the school of life is very hard, making no allowance for ignorance or mistakes. It strikes hard when the time for striking comes, and it seems a pity that beginners should not be able to utilise the hard-won experience of the wisdom of the race. They might at least be so forearmed as to be able to take advantage of the first

indication of a lesson from the great school-master life.

So, the teachable mind, the willing ear, the open tractable disposition, these are the first requisites for an apt pupil. Pride is the one unassailable stupidity. Pride is not looked on here as a deadly sin, but as an absolute bar to knowledge. It is the quality which marks the fool. This is ever the attitude of the Proverbs. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." The chief reason the Book gives for this consistent attitude to pride and self-sufficiency is that pride makes it impossible for a man to learn wisdom. It deprives him of any advantage to be got from the experience of others: it even takes away any chance of learning from the experience of self. This is in line with a deeper spiritual note which is all through the Bible that humility is the door to everything, the way to life itself. The humble soul, ready to hear, willing to accept reproof, will learn the secret of God. Repentance comes easy to humility, and repentance is the only method of forgiveness, and the only way to peace. To the humble alone are given the vision and the revelation: of such sweet, docile childlike souls is the Kingdom of Heaven. We can thus understand the stress laid

on this virtue in this Book and the despair with which it speaks of the proud and haughty, and of their inevitable failure. It is failure all along the line. For even in the ordinary conduct of life pride makes it impossible for a man to profit by the counsel or criticism, or warning, or reproof of others. Whereas, on the other hand, the humble is open to learn and to become wise.

Naturally, the sorest test of this disposition is found in the region of reproof: and so the Proverbs is full of counsel as to the right manner and the right spirit in which to receive rebuke. It is this which affords the dividing line. "A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool." "He is in the way of life that heedeth correction, but he that forsaketh reproof erreth." "Whoso loveth correction loveth knowledge, but he that hateth reproof is brutish." The one utterly hopeless folly is the folly that will not learn. The Book of Proverbs has many hard remarks about the fool, but by far the most frequent of the references is to the fool whose weakness is shown in his ignorance and self-conceit. He is the man who will have his own way, who, if he would only listen to reason, would see that his own way was a wrong way, but to listen to reason is the last thing he will

do. It is the temper that will not submit, that will not be trained and disciplined, that will not learn from reproof or counsel, so that the mind is a muddy mixture of ignorance and arrogance. That is the utter hopelessness of his case. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." It is ingrained; and when the inevitable consequences of his stupidity or vice fall upon his doomed head, he blames everybody and everything but himself. He puts it down to misfortune, to hard luck, to the lack of opportunity, to the evil of men, to the injustice of God—to anything but to the right cause, his own wilful neglect of all the lessons with which the world is vocal. It is not the simple who is condemned in the Proverbs, the witless, the scant of brain; it is the stubborn, the morally senseless who will go his own misguided way. And it is not the clever as such who are commended, but the humble who will listen to counsel and be warned against evil and learn to submit to the laws of all living, meekly accepting even reproof when merited.

The evidence of this laudable temper is to be found not only in listening to advice, but most of all in the attitude towards life itself which such a man takes up. Life is looked on as a discipline, a training for

character, replete with experiences both joyful and sorrowful which can enrich the whole nature. The world is not a place to find pleasure in first of all, but to find wisdom. So, not happiness but duty becomes the chief motive of those who appreciate the true situation. All experiences are full of meaning with a purpose if only we will use them aright. They can and ought to develop in us a true and pure, and sweet and strong character. They are meant to teach us wisdom, the knowledge of the world, the knowledge of self, the knowledge of God. Life is the great educator. None can teach us lessons as life can, and encourage and reprove as life does. Thus the humble teachable man, whom this Book calls the wise man, is he who sees these moral and spiritual possibilities in ordinary providence and pays heed to them. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise."

The reproof of life! Life has that for all of us, the bursting of the bubble of youthful hopes, the rude awakening from the idle dream. Things indeed are not what they seemed. The world is a different place from what we once imagined, and our lives have run upon different lines from what we once fondly hoped. We have been chastened. We have been reproved. We have been pulled up against the

inevitable. We have wounded our feet kicking against the pricks. It has taken some of us long to learn even the commonest facts of life, to say nothing of the inner facts and spiritual meaning of the whole. But it is something to be sure that we ought to have learned and that there is indeed something to learn.

What is the reproof of life? In keeping with the general shrewd wise teaching of this Book of Proverbs the reproof of life will mean, to begin with, the sane and sensible bearing towards the laws of health and life which experience teaches. We ourselves have a proverb which says that a man at forty will be either a fool or a physician, with the evident thought that by that time a man ought to have learned the simple elementary rules of health. We are inclined, however, to make too much of mere experience, or rather we limit the idea of experience to mere length of living. We speak of experience as if it were everything, and as if years necessarily brought it, something which only came by a regulation method. It does not follow that length of days brings wisdom. It does not follow that to have come through many vicissitudes of fortune, to have had many experiences, will give the right temper in which to meet and learn the reproof of life. Experience

teaches fools, we say. It ought to, but really it teaches everybody but fools. The important thing is not the number of the experiences. The impressionable heart can from one learn all. The stubborn heart will from all learn none. The important thing is not even the kind of experience, but the spirit in which it is met, the attitude taken up.

If the proof of this deepest of all wisdom is that the heart should hearken to the reproof of life, then the lesson can come in countless ways, and it can be learned *soon,* if only the heart is bent to it. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, if to know God is essential to truly know life, then that disposes at once of the many devilish sayings expressive of the devilish doctrine that wisdom consists of knowing evil in the sense of doing it. We speak of learning life, and seeing the world, and sowing wild oats as if that was the appointed way to life. It will only lead to a sorer, fiercer form of the reproof of life. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom," is one of William Blake's aphorisms, with a certain truth in it, namely that so many only learn wisdom after the severe punishment that came from unwisdom. The road of excess may sometimes lead to a palace of wisdom, but it is not the road to it, be assured by the testimony

of all the saints, by the witness of all the wise. It is a wisdom which is too late. It is a joyless wisdom, the wisdom which comes when the heart is eaten out, when life has lost its beauty and grace, and the world which might have been, which ought to be, the scene of purity of thought and grace of speech and nobility of deed turns to dust and ashes at the touch. Nay, my son, be wise, be admonished, learn the reproof of life on easier terms than that. "Wisdom crieth aloud in the street, she uttereth her voice in the broad places; in the city she uttereth her words, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? And scorners delight themselves in scorning? And fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

No man who would be wise need wait for the full reproof, which comes as a rod for the back of fools. Sooner, much sooner, is the time ripe for amendment than the heart is ripe. Easier comes the opportunity, than comes the will to use the opportunity. Not at the first reproof of life, nor at the second, do our stubborn hearts bend to the lesson. Not at the first knock, nor at the second, do we open the door to the gracious visitor who stands and knocks. The ear might have heard the reproof of life and been

counted among the wise long before it happened, even if it at length did happen.

> Ten years ago, five years ago,
> One year ago,
> Even then you had arrived in time,
> Though somewhat slow.

Yes, and even then you might have arrived in wisdom as you had arrived in time. It is not for want of opportunity, not for want of reproof, that you have let things slip, and are to-day like a knotless thread in the seam of life, with little or no meaning in your existence, with no relation to the divine wisdom of the world, because no relation to God who made the world, with no relation to Christ, the wisdom of God and the power of God. Is it for nothing that you have lived in this rich world with its lessons and revelations, with its sanctities and sacraments? If you have lived on the mere froth of existence, with petty thoughts and petty desires, filled with stupid meaningless frivolity, with never a true conception of life with its menace of death, or of death with its lesson of life, what about the reproofs that have come to you once and again, the dealings of providence, the pleadings of grace, the strokes on the heart, the knocks at the door, the sorrow and disappointment and affliction, the mystery, the passion,

the pathos, the tragedy, the reproof of life showered on your impenitent heart and your senseless mind? And what about the day of calamity that shall be, when your fear cometh, when the black terror that lurks for you somewhere in some corner of the road will at last grip you, when the last and final reproof comes, is it nothing that failure must be writ over it all, a life redeemed by no nobleness or sacrifice or love, saved by no deathless hope, sanctified by no hidden communion? The pity of it—the miserable folly and shame and mistake of it! "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise."

Is this all the reproof of life? a pitiless consequence of cause and effect, a punishment of mistake when it is irretrievable, "judgment prepared for scorners and stripes for the backs of fools"? Nay, to the hearing ear and the understanding heart the reproof of life, however hard it may have pressed, is more than the discipline of an inflexible law. It has a secret, which the humble enquiring ear hears to its sweet and lasting content. We know that it is not easy to accept reproof from another man, even when our conscience tells us it is merited. How we flare up when any one tries it! It needs a very humble tongue on the one hand, as well as a very humble ear on the other, to speak and to hear words of reproof.

There is usually a touch of the Pharisee in the tone of the reprover, if there is also a touch of irritation in the reproved. Now the secret of the text is this. It is easy to receive reproof, when we know that it is prompted and guided by *love*. If we were always sure that reproof was not for the personal triumph of the reprover, nor the fruit of vanity and self-righteousness, nor out of malice; if we were sure it hurt the reprover as much if not more to rebuke because he loved, we would submit humbly.

Now, this is the secret in the larger affair of the reproof of life. When we realise that the reproof of life which comes to us in our sorrows and losses is the very evidence of love, and because our Father cares for us, and cares most of all for the best in us, we will bend to it and hearken. That is the ripe wisdom which comes to some—we see it sometimes in their faces with their serene brow and calm eyes and patient lips—the reproof which has been accepted and taken to feed the soul. That is the ripe wisdom which this world can afford to those who are obedient to the will of God, the true knowledge of life which is knowledge of God, which looks upon life as Paul looked upon the Jewish law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. This is the secret of the reproof of life, to learn the secret of the Lord,

to bend to the will of God, to see the touch of a pitiful love in all the dealings of providence, to be calm at the heart amid all the ferments of the world, with an ear that hearkens for God, a heart that asks to know His will, a soul that cradles itself in the love of the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord; the faith which brings peace, and will bring, if it be God's will,

> An old age serene and bright
> And calm as is a Lapland night.

XIX

THE COURAGE AND THE COWARDICE OF SIN

His blood be on us and on our children.—MATTHEW xxvii. 25.
Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us.—ACTS v. 28.

How differently things look at different times! In the heat of passion consequences look small and of little account, but when the blood has time to cool the whole matter takes on another aspect. Looking forward in eager desire to a coveted object, nothing can be allowed to stand in the way, nothing is worth considering compared with the thing wanted; but looking back on the attainment, we cannot imagine that we offered such a price for it. When the balance of judgment is shaken by passion any risk seems small, any consequence seems cheap, but afterwards we think we must have been besotted to make such a poor bargain. Passion gives a spurious courage which throws down the gauntlet with an air of bravado, to be succeeded by a cowardice all the more apparent after the high and vaunting words. There is a daring of sin which is not afraid to assume all the

responsibility if there is to be any, which is willing to accept any consequences. Who is afraid to pay the price, to reap the fruit of the deed? "His blood be on us and on our children." But when the deed is done, men whimper if the consequences they derided come, and cannot believe that they should be expected to pay the price they foresaw. "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us"—a grieved complaint of injured men who refuse any sense of responsibility. The courage and the cowardice of sin!

In cold blood how differently this judicial murder of Jesus looked to all the actors in the tragedy! Pilate, whose blood had never been anything but cold, had washed his hands of it, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." Judas, who betrayed his Lord, went back with the thirty pieces of silver in despair when the dark passion had left his heart. "See thou to it," the priests said to Judas. You did it, and that is your concern; you cannot cast the burden on us by throwing back the money. And now the rulers who engineered the accusation say complainingly to the men who by their preaching were keeping green the memory of their victim, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us." None can be brought to accept the responsibility for this deed of shame. But the refusal did not

alter any of the facts. Judas had to see to it: Pilate had to see to it: priests and people, themselves and their children, have had to see to it ever since. It did not need these formal words when the passion was on them to fix the responsibility. It was there, whether they owned to it or not. But the formal words are there too, giving point to the irony of history.

You remember how the words came to be uttered. At the trial of Jesus, Pilate had no heat of passion to overturn his reason. He was cold and calculating all the time. He did not want to condemn an innocent man, but he did not want government to be troubled with a possible riot and did not want his own name to be implicated at Rome. He pacified the populace by assenting to the crime, and appeased his conscience by disowning it. It was an absurd and impossible thing, though it is a common enough device. He cleared himself of the guilt by taking water and washing his hands before the multitude, as a sign that he acquitted himself and refused to contract any guilt in the matter. "I am innocent," he said, "of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." How readily we think that if we protest against a thing formally we absolve ourselves! Pilate did not want to have his name associated with a riot at Jerusalem; and his name has been associated for ever with this

judicial murder. Little did the proud Roman think that his name would go down to all the years, to all the world in infamy. To get what they wanted priests and people formally and solemnly consented to take the guilt on themselves. In the heat of passion it was done, and in the cunning policy that passion dictates even when it boils. It was done to tie Pilate down to their will. It was as much as to say, If it is only a qualm of conscience that troubles you, we will take the responsibility, our conscience is strong enough to relieve you of the guilt. In their fierce unrelenting madness of hate they utter the imprecation on themselves, regardless of any sort of consequence, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Look on that picture, and now look on this. The deed was forgotten, buried, and life in the city went on as before, till the priests and rulers are annoyed by a little band of men keeping alive the name of this same Jesus whom they had crucified. Those responsible for government are always and naturally content with keeping things going smoothly, and do not want to be troubled with new doctrines. When it suited their own purpose the chief priests could create a disturbance better than any, but in normal times they want to avoid disturbance. So they set themselves by threats and imprisonment to choke off this new

movement. In prison or out of it, however, Peter and the Apostles go on firmly and calmly, and the people are being won over. They are summoned before the council, and this is the charge, "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?"—this name which they thought they had disposed of, but which was reappearing like an accusing ghost. "Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." It was fear of the people that was at the bottom of this complaint. They were not thinking of the moral guilt before God of having done to death an innocent man, but of the possibility of vengeance at the hands of an inflamed populace who might be taught to think that they should right the wrong by vengeance. They do not want those things which they had quietly buried to be raked up again. They take it as an affront that blame should be laid at their door. Was not this man punished at the hands of Roman justice? What had they to do with it? They would now wash their hands of it all. Let Pilate or somebody else see to it. They feel they have just cause of complaint, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Peter replied, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." His answer is a simple state-

ment of fact, "We are witnesses of these things." Protesting and asserting and denying will not affect facts. "Ye slew Him and hanged Him on a tree."

The priests probably did not remember the words that had been used at the trial of Jesus. The words had only been used as a move in the game with Pilate, and the present protestation had no reference to the previous words, but the two sayings give a dramatic turn to the situation, and bring out the deep truth we have suggested of the false courage and the weak cowardice of sin. In the heat and passion of the persecution of Jesus they took on them with light hearts all the guilt, if there was any. They were not afraid to assume responsibility, but now they would creep out of their own contract, shuffle off any guilt in the matter and wash their hands of the whole concern. Have they not themselves to thank if the blood is brought upon them? Ye slew Him and hanged Him on a tree, says Peter relentlessly. Had they not said in their hate, "His blood be on us and on our children?" But the daring has ebbed out of them, and they whimper out the charge, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

It is so with all forms of passion. In the fever of desire a man is willing to pay any price, to accept any consequences. He believes that this thing he de-

sires is worth paying for, or he shuts his eyes to the fact that payment will be demanded. Tell him in the heat of his passion that this will follow, and this, and this. Show him the inevitable consequences, what he risks, what he must lose, what may happen. He will say in the spasm of Dutch courage, Let it happen, let it all come, let the consequences be what they may, this I must have and shall. It is madness if you will, derangement of judgment; but that is part of the deceitfulness of sin, the way temptation overturns the will and unseats the reason.

Is it only a leaf from ancient history this, or has it a living moral for living men and women to-day? Does not the drunkard know all that you can tell him, better than you can tell him, what he is paying for his sin, what he is losing, what he must suffer and cause others to suffer? He knows it and in a way he counts the cost, but when the fierce temptation strikes him he will say that he will take the consequences. It is derangement of judgment, giving for the moment a kind of daring, a spurious courage like the hoarse cry of priests and people that day in Jerusalem, "His blood be upon us and on our children." It is no musty moral from an old record, but a fact true to human nature now as ever, where the same temptations strike the same place in the heart, and

the same devil's reasoning deludes the soul. When the mad jealousy finds its seat in Cain's mind, when the smell of the pottage rises to Esau's nostrils, when the lust kindles in David's eye, when the jingle of the silver sounds in Judas' ear, when hate grows in the priests' heart and rage grips the mob before Pilate's seat, passion in each case sweeps away the defences and consequences are nothing. Any price so it be afterwards, the consequences be ours—we take them—the blood be on us! But when the passion has cooled and the price is demanded the tune changes, the whole situation looks different, the consequences which were despised when remote loom up in their true proportions. The daring tails off into weakness: the courage turns to cowardice. The confident cry, "His blood be upon us," becomes the whine, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us." How differently things look before and after!

It reminds us of the old stories of men selling themselves to the devil, signing a contract by which special powers are granted with the chance of every gratification for a term of years. The stories show us the man beginning with the idea that he is getting a good bargain and rather over-reaching the devil. The other side of the paction is meanwhile far-off and is assented to with an airy easy assurance. The

man is boastful of his powers, and is willing to accept all the consequences. When the term expires and the time for payment comes, a different song is sung. The stories show the man trying to convince himself that he has no responsibility, that the payment will never be demanded. He puts all the blame on the devil and none on himself. Something will be sure to happen to relieve him of his side of the paction. Then we see him in the climax of terror and alarm as the moment arrives; and the story ends with a mysterious disappearance, the squaring up of the liabilities.

The courage and the cowardice of sin! We see them exemplified every day. We recognise them in our own hearts at the two different stages, both often false. It is part of the deceitfulness of sin to deceive us in both stages, in the first to convince us that the consequences are nothing, and in the second to drive us to despair. Let not passion blind you to the fact that we live in a moral world governed by moral cause and effect as well as physical. What men sometimes call chance, and sometimes call fate, God calls consequence. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." "His blood be on us and on our children," cried the Jews on that fatal day, thinking that it meant noth-

ing, that they were only idle words. The words may have been idle, but the deed was not idle and bore its dread fruits. The fickleness and folly and prejudice and impenitence and cruelty, of which the deed spoke, brought their harvest in kind; and upon them came all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom they slew between the temple and the altar, and the more precious blood still of Jesus, whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Every page of their history since shows how tragically true their own self-judgment was that madly and blindly called for the blood to be on them and on their children. Spurn the subtle temptation which suggests that sin has no consequences. Distrust the spurious courage which shuts the eyes to risks. Refuse to listen to the folly that a man can sow the wind and yet somehow avoid the necessity of reaping the whirlwind.

In the other stage the deceitfulness of sin works equally falsely and insidiously, tempting a man this time to despair, suggesting that he is now past redemption, that he has made his bed and must lie on it, and that the best he can do is to evade as much as possible any disagreeable consequences. When evil can no longer deny moral results and moral punish-

ments, its last resource is to deny redemption, deny forgiveness, deny hope. "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us," querulously complained the priests. Yes, he did, as boldly he charged them, "Ye slew Him and hanged Him on a tree." But he had also a deeper and further intention, if they would but throw down their wretched defences, and confess their guilt and shame. He intended to show how they too might be cleansed by the penitential fires, how they too might be broken by that cross and saved by that blood. For them, too, was possible forgiveness, pardon, and peace, with their cruel eyes washed soft by tears, and their vile hearts washed clean by blood. For them, too, brooded the divine love and pity.

In this world of moral cause, of just law, of righteous judgment, let no man presume. Be not deceived; God is not mocked. In this world of grace, and love, and mercy, and compassion, this world which was the scene of Christ's life and ministry, this world for which Christ died, let no man despair.

XX

PERMISSION WITHOUT SANCTION

And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them. . . . And God came unto Balaam at night and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them. . . . And God's anger was kindled because he went.—NUMBERS xxii. 12, 20-22.

I DO not propose at this time to enter into a consideration of the complex character of Balaam as related in this story, except in so far as it may illustrate the subject suggested by our text. These words we have chosen touch some of the deepest problems of life and religion, the problems that circle round the subject of the place and freedom of the human will. I wish to treat it as little philosophically as possible, and as practically and ethically as I can. It is not necessary to enlarge much on the setting of our text. The situation of Balaam at this point of the narrative is a common one, allowing for the differences of time and custom and the accidentals of life. It is simply the situation of a man keenly desirous of doing something which he knows to be

wrong, and who seeks to reconcile a real conscientiousness with his desire.

Balak offers him things which his heart covets, if he will go to him and curse for him the Israelites. Balaam is persuaded in his own mind that he cannot do this as things stand, that it will be contrary to the will of God who has blessed Israel; and yet he would fain earn the reward in some way without being absolutely false. He would not accept once for all the plain intimation of God's will and the simple acceptance of duty; but at the same time he is determined not to disobey the dictates of conscience. This at least is his attitude to begin with. When Balak's messengers came with the bribes and promises, he held firm to what he believed to be God's will, and came out of the shock of the first temptation unharmed. "God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them. And Balaam rose up in the morning and said unto the princes of Balak, Get ye into your own land: for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." He had no doubt in his mind as to what God's will was in the matter, and he stated that unflinchingly in spite of the fact that he fain would have gone; and if nothing further had occurred, it would all have looked like a moral victory for Balaam; and indeed, so it was to some extent.

But it is not the way of temptation to come once and be content with a single repulse. On Balaam's refusal a still more imposing embassy was sent with more lavish promises of reward. If the former occasion had represented a complete moral victory, this would not have been much of a temptation. The prophet could only have repeated his refusal. He had learned what his duty was. But, enticed by the promised bribes, he cast about for some way of getting what his heart was set on. He thought he might possibly obtain leave to do what God had before forbidden. Instead of sending the envoys away, he bade them wait in the hope that he might be able to get a more favourable answer. He seemed to succeed; for he did receive permission to go. "God said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them." Nothing was really altered. He knew he was not allowed to curse instead of bless. But he still hoped that some further concession might be granted which would enable him to earn the reward. He was only entering into temptation, getting nearer to it, playing with it, going with open eyes into a situation which would inevitably make it more difficult for him to be true. The permission he received to go did not change the facts of the case, did not alter God's will, could not alter it; it only brought

Balaam himself into deeper waters, and gave him a harder battle to fight with temptation; it was a long step towards the ultimate degradation and the final plunge.

This is no character-sketch of Balaam; or there would here lie on the very surface for us many lessons of warning and counsel, warnings about the beginning of evil and the genesis of sin in the mind, and dallying with temptation. I prefer just now to touch a deeper thought suggested by the words of our text, with their startling contrast, "God said unto Balaam, Go. . . . And God's anger was kindled because he went." Subtle and complex as Balaam's character may have been, it contains no such strange and dark mystery as the mystery of God's providence shadowed forth in these astounding words. At first it seems a mistake, an impossible reading of events. What tragedy, and what mystery underlie these sentences, "God said unto Baalam, Thou shalt not go with them." And then because Balaam wanted it, longed for it, set his heart on it, "God said unto him, Go." And all the time he was going to his own hurt, compassing his life about with many evils. "God's anger was kindled against him because he went." The paradox of Balaam's character, great as it is, is nothing to the appalling para-

dox that God should permit what is against His will —that a man should receive a permission which was not a sanction.

Yet is not this the common situation of us all? Is this not the invariable environment of all moral life, that we are allowed to enter into temptation, allowed to go against the very will of God? That this should be so, that man should possess such terrible power, seems the great mystery of our life; and yet it cannot be otherwise if we are to remain men. It is no isolated instance, this case of Balaam's. Right through the Bible we find the same explanation of this weird power of man to go against God and to get his way against God to his own undoing; as when Israel desired a king, in order to be like other nations, rather than be a theocracy in which they had no king but God, it is stated that God gave them a king in His anger; or the Psalmist's explanation of the fatal time in the desert, when the Israelites lusted after the flesh-pots of Egypt and despised the manna; and when the flesh-meat came it brought with it a terrible plague from which many died. The Psalmist points the same moral, "They lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul."

It represents a fact of moral life. Permission which implied no sanction, nay, which carried with it inevitable danger! We sometimes ask why it should be so, and wonder if it might not have been otherwise. Is it necessary that we should have to run such risks and undergo such menace? If God's anger is to be kindled against Balaam if he went, why ever permit him to go? If to agree to the Israelites' request means to send leanness into their souls, why ever give them their request? This is the great mystery of sin, and the great mystery (of which it is a part) of man's free will, which means freedom to do wrong as well as to do right, freedom to sin, freedom to go against the law of our own being and against the law of God and the will of God. In this respect God cannot keep from us what we want. God does not—cannot—violate man's will, compelling him as by physical necessity to do right. It would cease to be a moral world, and we would cease to be men in the sense we are. Only moral means can be used to achieve a moral end. Thus the place of a man in the spiritual kingdom is settled not by his gifts, or attainments, or capacities, or actions even, but by his will. When Balaam desired, longed, willed to go, what could even God do but say to him, "Go"?

For, notice further, that from the point of view of pure morality the evil was done. The birth of sin is not in the sinful act, but in the sinful desire. Lady Macbeth's argument to her husband, after he had planned the murder of Duncan, and then wavered—not because he repented, but partly for reasons of fear, and partly for reasons of policy—is a cogent argument from the purely moral point of view. Her argument is that he was guilty of the crime already, since it was still in his heart.

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem;
> Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?

Not that a man who thinks evil may as well go on to commit the evil, though that is the devil's argument which comes to many a man, and which Lady Macbeth made use of in the passage quoted; but that the first guilt of sin does lie in the evil will; and an evil will only needs opportunity in order to blossom out into the full-blown crime, or vice, or cruelty, or shame. Balaam had disobeyed God in his heart before he set out for Balak's court. He was not really a worse man through the permission to go. Indeed, it was perhaps the only chance for him to become

a better man by being compelled to realise that he *was* offending God. This permission to go was only the natural and even the inevitable result of the kindling passion in his heart.

What we lust after, what we give our heart to, what we really request from God and from man, what we desire as our chief good and foster in our thoughts as the imperious need of our lives, that we cannot but get. Though it be tempting God as the Israelites did, God will give us our request, though it means sending leanness into our soul. When we make our deliberate, conscious, persistent choice, the mere practical form it takes is a detail. If our mind is ever turning towards some darling sin, as Balaam lusted after the reward, how can we, in a world like this, which is built on moral principles, be prevented from carrying our desire into action? We cannot will the evil, and be saved from all the consequences and the fruits of evil. The sin of the heart only lacks an opportunity to be turned into conduct; and God cannot keep the opportunity from us for ever. The evil is already done, when the heart is wholly given up to it. Sooner or later we have our way. We persist: we tempt God for it: we desire it: we seek it: we will have it and must have it—take it, the sin and its sting, "Go. . . . And God's anger was kindled because he went."

Safety is to be found alone in the sphere wherein lies the danger, in the will. Even from the most sinful life and surroundings there is ever a point of departure for each of us in the will. The free will of man is at last justified, and only then, when it is freely given to God. If sin finds its hold and seat there, so also does salvation. We always come back to heart-religion; for nothing else is of any avail. No outside prevention, no careful cleansing of the outside of cup and platter is of use. Even if Balaam had not gone and yet had his heart full of covetousness, the mere abstention was nothing. Balaam is only safe when he does not even *want* to go since it is against God's will. He is only safe if he would not go though he could, since he knows it is contrary to the will of God. Only that will is safe, which is conformed to the will of God, which really seeks to do the will of God, which is guarded and inspired, at once protected and driven, by the will of God. Only that heart is safe which is fixed upon God. The ideal for man is a holy will which voluntarily chooses the good, which says, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." If we make God's will our will, His way shall be our way; and when He bids us go, we need fear no evil, for He is with us, even in the dark valley of the shadow of death.

XXI

RIGHTFUL CONFORMITY

Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.—St. Matthew iii. 15.

One of the practical problems of life is to know how far we should comply with established custom and conventional ways of both thinking and acting. At first sight it appears an easy question to decide by saying broadly and generally that every man is in the last resort responsible for himself, and ought therefore to do what seems right in his own eyes, refusing to submit to the authority of numbers, and the assumed sacredness of custom which would drag all alike down to the same dead dull level. To conform to others in anything is to lose the most precious gift of independence, which alone makes progress possible for the race. No man should be asked to give up his own opinions, to acquiesce in traditional standards, to comply with accepted habits. We have our individual lives to live, and not any man, and not all men, can arrogate the place of judge. Freedom of thought, independence of action are indisputable

rights which follow from the sense of personal responsibility. If man's life should be ruled by conscience (and all schools of morals not only admit this, but insist on it), if the moral burden of decision rests on a man's own soul; then he must be allowed to rule his own course, he must not be terrorised by mere convention and expected to conform to what others think right; nay, if need be, he must be allowed to dissent from the opinions, and practices, and beliefs, and manner of living of others.

In theory at least, every school of thought grants this freedom. In political affairs this is the foundation of all democratic government. The majority governs, but it is left to the minority to become a majority whenever it can, by protesting, by influencing opinion. The same is true in the region of abstract thought. The mind of man has been freed from the shackles of mere authority. Men need not think according to pattern. They need not give in to any prejudice or any custom whatever. And religiously this nonconformity is an accepted principle: it is at the very heart of all personal religion, which starts with the idea of personal responsibility. This freedom from the bondage of others' opinion was St. Paul's claim for all Christians. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth. Who art thou that

judgest another man's servant? We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"—therefore, we need not stand before the judgment seat of men now. This is the inevitable implication from the personal relationship between God and the human soul on which religion is based.

All this is easy in theory. Freedom is the natural right of man. All conformity with others for mere conformity's sake is sinful cowardice, an abrogation of the rights of man. This would seem to settle the question, and make the title of our sermon, "Rightful Conformity," a contradiction in terms. But in practice this doctrine of unlimited liberty does not work out so well. If we lived separated lives, apart from each other, with no responsibility for others, and no duties towards others; if we were able to shut ourselves off from the impact of other lives on ours, there would be no difficulty. But we live *in society,* with social obligations, with mutual interdependence. The whole problem of living is how to adjust the rights of others with the undoubted rights of self. How far in practice can we carry out our doctrine of freedom? Is it unlimited? We need only ask the question to know the answer. The social bond, through which all progress hitherto has been acquired, would be impossible under such a strain. If

minorities have rights, does the mind of the majority count for nothing? Practically in every region of thought and activity, in business, in politics, in social duties, we are ever face to face with this question, Is it not necessary often to come to a compromise when we differ, a modifying of some element of what we consider truth in order to work and live together?

Now as a matter of fact we have to make concessions, and do make them in every sphere of life; give up some of our liberty of thought and action; even comply with the opinion and feelings of others. You see the problem that emerges. Theoretically we should ever be independent truth-seekers in things of intellect, fearless followers of right in things of conscience, thinking, and saying, and doing everything according to our own mind and heart, unfettered by the conventions of the present and by the traditions of the past: and yet practically we know that we are not so free as our theory makes out; we know that this liberty of ours is qualified by the facts of social life.

In religion the problem is keener than elsewhere, for the reason that religion deals with the very soul of man. St. Paul, who formulated his doctrine of freedom from the interference of men in the things

of the spirit, yet professed that he would become all things to all men, and made expediency almost a principle. He was too shrewd and too sane a man to think that he could serve the cause he had at heart by running counter to every established custom, and offending every prejudice. To him also the new faith was the fruition of the old, as every faith must be to be worth anything to the world; and so the new had to displace the old, not by cataclysm, but by growth. St. Paul, therefore, would go as far as he could in compromise. For example, circumcision was nothing to him, and he would never consent to make it essential for Gentiles to be circumcised, but he would not prohibit Jews from continuing the old rite of their race; and even himself circumcised Timothy, in order to avoid giving offence to the Jews.

In this attitude he was only following the example of Jesus, as illustrated from the passage of our text, "Suffer it to be so now." From this attitude of our Lord we can learn some things which should help us to solve our practical difficulty. Our Lord did not renounce the religion of His fathers. He was a reformer, an innovator, and the effect of His work was to make old things pass away and make all things new. But the key-note of all His teaching was that

He came not to destroy but to fulfil. The true reformer is never an iconoclast, bent only on destruction, ever denouncing, ever tearing down the old without an eye to what is to replace the old. Men cannot start fresh as if the past had brought no gains and no conditions. Progress is nothing if it is not growth, and growth implies roots. Every human institution has roots in the past, long roots. To cut the roots is to kill the plant. John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness, a protester, apart from the life of his time, and so his work has had no lasting influence. He was a nine days' wonder, and affected the surface of his time, but that was all. Our Lord's work was essentially related to the life of the past and of the present; and so it has been the life of the future ever since. It was intensely original, and aimed at reformation so great that it amounted to revolution; but it was joined on to life, and carried forward all that was good in the past. He conformed with all the law as pious Jews did. He was circumcised: He kept the feasts and went up to Jerusalem as others did: He went to the Synagogue as the custom was: He paid the temple-tax; and here we find Him submitting to John's baptism, even when John protested that it was unseemly that he should do it.

John did not know Jesus as we know Him, probably had no very clear conception of Christ's character; but he was sufficiently impressed by Him to feel the incongruity of the situation. And this fact that Jesus submitted to be baptised must have meant a difficulty to many Christians reading it in the Gospels, if this explanation given by our Lord had not been stated. For was it not admitting almost inferiority, or at least admitting need like other weak men? Does it not take away from His dignity? Should such an original teacher conform to the prescribed rules and forms of his predecessors? Jesus sought to show John the essential seemliness and fitness of it. "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

Every religious form that could be useful to the spiritual life would be used by Him. Just because He was above all forms, He would take them and fill them with new meaning; carry them forward into the new era. Christ was a Jew, and so took on Him all the privileges and all the disabilities of His race, entering into human history where it was, coming as a man among men, not as a bolt out of the blue. God had spoken to men through the law and the prophets; He did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to carry them out to their true fulfilment. He

took up the task and the burden where it was, and led men on to a higher life. To have done otherwise, to have ridden rough-shod over the dearest possessions of Jewish history, even if that were His ultimate aim, would have been bad policy. He never could have ushered in the new era by such means. And it would have shown that He did not understand the real state of the case and the real problem of human development.

Many would-be reformers err here, laying emphasis on accidental details, irritating people by stupid protests, which even if they could be carried would not touch the real point. There is an impropriety in many protests, which are only evidence of bad taste and want of sense—sometimes by putting stress on little things, lacking the sound sense of Richter (as Mr. Hamilton Mabie puts it in an Essay on the Failings of Genius)—Richter, "who when he found that his habit of omitting the omnipresent collar from his toilet set all tongues a-wagging, wisely concluded to conform to the fashion in a trivial matter, in order that he might put his whole strength into a struggle on vital principles." Of course, if a man's aim is to come out as a reformer of dress, it is his duty to take liberties with the ordinary civilised toilet. But if he has deeper things in his mind, he is

only giving needless offence and risking his great cause by indulging the vanity of eccentricity.

Another common way in which reformers hurt their own cause is by refusing to take any bread because they cannot get the whole loaf, refusing any compromise even that will meanwhile advance their cause. A man may be a Republican in theory, and may hold that Monarchy is wrong and a weakness to any nation; but even on his own grounds, it would be foolish to refuse to take part in any movement which had the good of the people at heart because it was not done under his ideally perfect government. A man may be a Prohibitionist in theory, but if he refuses even to work with any who have smaller schemes in hand because they do not go so far as his views, he is a traitor to his own cause. The principle can be applied to every sphere of progress. A man may have a nobler conception of religion than that of the Churches, a more spiritual and more living faith; but the question for him to settle with himself is whether he is justified in separating from the worship of his fellows. To cut yourself off from the life of your time is to mutilate your own life and to impoverish the life of others. It prevents you from really understanding and helping them. You make yourself a voluntary outlaw, with no relation to

others. Some reformers have too many corners and angularities about them to allow others to work along with them.

Now there are times when it is necessary for true men to make their protest, to refuse any compromise, to wash their hands of any complicity with an established state of things, times when conformity is sinful and cowardly, and nonconformity alone is right (and with that side I hope to deal in my next sermon), but there is a reverence which is becoming to us even when we see imperfections in the form which tempts us to protest. Our Master's view even of baptism was larger and grander than John's view; for to John it was the baptism of repentence merely, but to Jesus it meant also entrance into the fuller, larger life, the life of love; yet He said, "Suffer it to be so now; for it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

This attitude is not the indifference of those to whom nothing matters much, and who choose to conform just to save themselves from the pain of protest; nor is it confession of failure, the pessimism of Matthew Arnold's intolerably sad poem of unfaith,

> Creep into thy narrow bed,
> Creep and let no more be said.
> Let the long contention cease.

> Geese are swans and swans are geese.
> Let them have it how they will.
> Thou art tired; best be still.

That is a counsel of despair, ceasing to protest because there is no longer any more fight in him, giving up the conflict in weariness, the unbelief which wonders whether it can ever be worth the sacrifice for a man to run counter to the customs to which the world is wedded. That sort of conforming is the essence of weakness, laying down the arms in a mood of hopelessness. When our Lord said, "Suffer it to be so now," it was a prelude to victory, taking a form which to many was dead, and filling it with living meaning, reverently using what had represented a great religious truth to many a soul, and carrying it forward to the new and larger future. It altogether depends on the spirit as to whether conformity with any established rite is a sign of weakness or of strength, a crime and a cowardice, or a virtue and a glory.

For (and this is the touchstone to try our own motives), the motive of our Lord's conformity related in our text was not worldly-wisdom, not the craftiness of wily ecclesiasticism seeking to make men imagine He accepted forms He really meant to destroy. Its ethical motive was love. It was not that He needed to be baptised, not to confess sin, but a

desire to stand beside others. It was the fruit of sympathy, seeking to identify Himself with men, sinning sorrowing men, whom He longed to save and lead to God. There was a seemliness about it hid even to John's eyes. It became Him who for love's sake was to be baptised with another baptism. Well did it become Him to fulfil all the law even in form who came to fulfil it in very essence. Love is the fulfilling of the law.

If love akin to the Master's is in your heart, you will be saved from any of the dangers and temptations which accompany conformity with what you acknowledge is imperfect. You will never conform through sluggishness and love of ease, or through indifference and despair of good; but because you will not be separated from your brethren, but will work for them and strive with them and give your life in their service, seeking to lead them to higher things; not haughtily and proudly standing aloof in fancied superiority, but one with them in all things. Your conformity will never be selfish, to avoid trouble or pain to yourself; but inspired by the love which gives unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. You will be all things to all men, if by any means you may gain some.

XXII

NEEDFUL NONCONFORMITY

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say and do not.— St. Matthew xxiii. 3.

Again and again in the course of His public ministry our Lord was forced into opposition to the religious leaders of His time. He was thwarted and obstructed in His work. His teaching was met with contemptuous indifference in the first instance, and afterwards with active and inveterate enmity. They stood in the way of enlightenment for the people; and did all that envy and malice could do to counteract His influence. This attitude of opposition was none of His choosing. He was not a mere destructive reformer, a critic of existing things, an image-breaker who looked upon the breaking of images as in itself a great work. He came not to destroy but to fulfil. It is true that the fulfilment implied the passing of the old into new forms, and would mean change, the displacement of some cherished ideas and

practices, the transformation of the letter by the inspiring spirit. But the attitude which our Lord took to the religion of His day was not one of criticism, or of negation. He was scrupulous in conforming to all the law, as we saw in the last sermon in considering His attitude to John the Baptist when he submitted to be baptised by Him.

He knew that much had to be changed in Jewish religion before it could bless the Isles with its law: it was His life-work to change it. But He never cut Himself off from the religion of His time: never disfranchised Himself as a Jew. If He had, where would He have begun, where got foothold to pursue His work? If He had been a mere protester, a mere destructionist, much good of a kind might have been done, abuses might have been remedied, and reforms been introduced as a result of His criticism, but there would not have been the great reach forward to a spiritual religion. The God who spoke to men in Christ was the same God who had spoken at sundry times in diverse manners unto their fathers by the prophets. His revelation was the sum and completion of all previous revelations, the perfect round of which these were the broken arcs. On all occasions, even when denouncing and condemning, He safeguarded the law itself. He would not give ex-

cuse for any of His hearers to imagine that the law was abrogated because He criticised the interpreters of the law. The law of God is the law of all life; and "till heaven and earth pass away one jot or tittle of the law shall in no wise pass away."

So here, when the fundamental differences between Christ and the Pharisees reached a climax, when He was compelled to pronounce upon them the most scathing condemnation, He is still consistent with His whole attitude of conformity. He recognises the Scribes and Pharisees in so far as they sit in Moses' seat, in so far as they teach the law; and He calls upon His audience to reverently bend to the yoke of the law. "All whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." Christ did not wish His hearers to think that because He condemned the Pharisees they were at liberty to release themselves from the moral obligation of the law of God. He enforces upon them the duty of complying with the demands of the law. Never once did He preach rebellion; or let men dream that they could reach any solution of difficulties by simply cutting themselves off from the life of their time. At this very moment, when He Himself is breaking irrevocably with the religious leaders of Israel, He prefaces His indictment with an admonition to obey. The teaching underlying

these awful woes is really conservative in its tone, protecting the essential good of Jewish religion. The true reformer is the true conservative. He destroys abuses that the good of the past may be preserved.

Still the whole passage is a protest, burning with the white heat of dissent, preaching the need and the duty of nonconformity. The keynote of it is struck at the very first in these words, "Do not ye after their works." The problem of how far we should comply with established custom in thinking and acting is a very real one. It confronts us in every region of life. In business, and politics, and ordinary social duty, and religion we are continually face to face with it. It is not only the political or social or religious reformer who feels the pinch of the problem; though to him it is perhaps keener. But every young man especially, before his manner of thinking and way of living have got set and hardened, is presented with the problem in some of its forms. How far should he accept compromise, and make the best of the present conditions, and just take things as they are, and conform himself to the accepted views and habits of his circle? He begins business, and enters at once into a certain atmosphere for which he is not responsible, with recognised customs of trade and

standards of obligation. Is he to accept these as sacred, the unalterable conditions of his particular lot? Or is he to run counter to tradition and conventional usage in the interests of what he considers a higher morality? He wants to do what is right; he wants to keep his hands clean and his heart pure. But he finds that he cannot start fresh even in business. He soon finds that he can do right things wrongly, and hurt the cause he has at heart.

He may become hypersensitive, laying stress upon minor points and accidental details, needlessly creating offence and opposition, which he finds afterwards might have been avoided with a little more tact. He can run amuck against cherished notions that do not count much one way or another, mistaking windmills for giants. Or, on the other hand, he can settle down to the common standards of his circle, the approved morality and traditional customs of others, however alien to his true spirit. Life is not an easy thing to a man of mind and heart and soul; and this problem of conformity is not an academic and interesting intellectual discussion. No young man can begin life anywhere, in business, or office, or in one of the professions, without having this subject forced on him somehow. He has to make up his mind about the unwritten but strong laws which custom binds on men,

the standards of commercial morality, the customs of trade, the etiquette of profession, the social machinery of which he is a part.

In the region of opinion and belief, the difficulty is no less real. We are born into an intellectual and spiritual climate, as well as a physical. Are we to set up our own individual opinion against the thoughts and faith of our time? How far must we be willing to make compromise in order to achieve some purpose we desire? In politics, for example, should a man be a member of a party, since that inevitably means that he must be ready to concede in some things more than he would like, and in other points take less than he thinks right, in order to get something practicable done? If he does enter a party, he must make concessions, must comply with the feelings and even the prejudices of others, must modify some side of what he considers truth, must conform with the opinions of others in order to work along with them. Or should he be a free-lance, bending to no yoke but his own will, making no compromise, giving in to no judgment but his own? In the one case he runs the risk of being false to truth and conscience; in the other he runs the risk of wasting his life, and being put aside as a hopeless irreconcilable. In the deepest of all questions, in religion,

the same problem of conformity arises. Should a man stand aloof from the worship of his brethren, because he does not see eye to eye with them in all points of faith and Church government? Must we not give and take here, too, as well as in other spheres of practical life?

In the preceding sermon we discussed this side of the problem, and showed the place of rightful conformity, the need of it to give continuity to life, to keep it from being broken up into separate and unrelated fragments, illustrating it by the example of our Lord, who conformed in all things though He was the most original thinker in religion the world has ever seen. We saw the necessity for conformity, even in the interests of growth and reform. Here the whole line of our thinking is setting in the opposite direction, asserting the place and function of needful nonconformity. To avoid the appearance of one-sidedness on both occasions, I could have wished that it had been possible to consider both sides together. It is only another illustration of the terrorism of custom, and the need to conform even with unwritten law, which prohibits a preacher from taking an hour for a single sermon. Even with the danger of one-sidedness I am glad to make this side of nonconformity the last word on the subject; for after all the

temptations here are stronger than on the other side.

Now, it is true that some dissent from accepted positions is due to temper and stupid self-will, or to eccentricity and conceit and love of being singular. It is true that a man can find cheap ways to notoriety by protesting, and dissenting, and riding roughshod over established custom. It is true that every young man of any intelligence is tempted to show his cleverness by being very advanced, and very heretical, and very unlike the common crowd. These and other such-like temptations to nonconformity we know. But, on the whole, the weight of the balance is on the other side. The tendency of life is to harden and set itself in dead forms. Much of our lives must be conventional—and it is easy to make the whole of it an unthinking conformity. The basis of every art is common to all artists, and while the weaker ones are tempted to show superiority by discarding the laws of art, by extravagance and *outré* effects, yet the other temptation is also real never to move outside the recognised limits, and, to go on repeating the old forms in helpless imitation. We must discriminate between rightful conformity and the conformity of dulness.

In all things there is possible also the conformity

of cowardice. Men shrink from the pains of dissent; for where it is real and the fruit of principle, there is often no anguish like that of feeling oneself separated from one's brethren. Society sometimes punishes the dissenter terribly. To a sensitive man nothing is so painful as to be ostracised and excommunicated. It is easy to silence conscience which would prompt us to stand for truth, by telling over to ourselves the penalties to be paid by the truth-seeker. We speak of expediency, and tactfulness in making changes, and that is all very well in ordinary matters that don't involve principle; but there is a false expediency much worshipped to-day, an expediency which seems to think that ignoble and degrading compliance is excused by being done for the sake of peace. Peace is dearly bought at the expense of principle. The whole character is enfeebled, and the whole life is impoverished. Timidity, fearfulness of standing alone, love of ease, can all be allies to war on the side of letting well, or ill, alone.

If to the conformity of cowardice we add the conformity of indifference, through which many a man refuses the noble part because he is not sufficiently alive to the distinctions between right and wrong; and if we add also the conformity of despair, of un-

belief, which makes earnest men give up the struggle for truth and right in hopelessness: I say, if we consider all the temptations to think, and speak, and act with the multitude, we will see that we must be careful to preserve to ourselves, and to others, the right of freedom of conscience and of intellect, and will admit the need of nonconformity.

When we realise the strength of conformity ever acting on us, we will guard against weak compliance, and will be very tender towards any who take it upon themselves to suffer for conscience' sake. For, after all, it is from the individual that the race has hope for the future. The rising light touches the topmost peak first, and is the herald of the universal dawn. And in the last issue a man is not absolved from complicity in evil because he has followed a multitude. He never can shake off his own personal responsibility. He is called to be loyal to the truth as he knows it. If no man thought differently from others; if no man greatly dared and was content to stand alone, where could progress come in for all of us? We are too conformable, too gregarious, too conventional, too timid about being ourselves. Emerson's doctrine of Self-reliance is needed to brace us to the highest work, "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. . . . Whoso would be a man must be

a nonconformist. . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."

Issues come before us that demand a rigid adherence to right, to what we believe in our heart to be truth; and no casuistry can alter the plain fact that in choosing to go with the many in the broad and easy way we are making the great refusal: nothing can take from us the responsibility of our decisions. Lord Bacon in his Apophthegms quotes Jason the Thessalian as saying that some things must be done unjustly that many things may be done justly. It is the world's favourite doctrine of expediency, which can excuse anything. It is a devil's doctrine, against which there cannot be too strong a protest. Our Lord's attitude towards the Pharisees, based on wise conformity, and yet fearless in the cause of God's right—our Lord's example should be our guide. It is never right to temporise with wrong, to participate in a lie, to pretend for the sake of peace that darkness is light and evil is good. What they say in accordance with the law of God that observe and do, but do not ye after their works. He went to His death in protest.

A good, if rough and ready, test as to your own character is to be found in asking what are the limits of compromise with yourself? In what are you non-

conformists, standing up against the tendencies of your world? A man can know himself by what he does *not* do, by the company he does not keep, by the customs he will not conform to. You will not carry the principle too far after all that has been urged on the other side; for it must not be forgotten that a man is judged by his positives, not by his negatives. But you have not come to your majority as a man, till you have learnt negation, denial, dissent, protest, nonconformity. Great movements of thought have ever sprung from dissent. Every change must have a point of departure. And individually, if there is to be anything higher and nobler in your life than it has yet seen, there must be somewhere a point of departure. "Do not ye after their works" will be a voice that sounds in ear and heart and conscience.

As conformity must be inspired by love, not by worldly-wisdom to be saved from sin, so nonconformity must be inspired by truth and not by pride and self-opinionative conceit. It must have back of it the thought of God and what is well-pleasing to Him. Then anything is possible, even the pain of separation, even the desolation of loneliness. "What," said the cardinal legate, who had been sent from Rome to bring Luther to terms, "do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German boor?

The Pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend *you—you,* a wretched worm like you? I tell you, No! and where will you be then—where will you be then?"

Luther answered, "Then, as now, in the hands of Almighty God."

XXIII

THE CHURCH'S APPEAL TO MEN

Come with us and we will do thee good. Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.—NUMBERS x. 29-31.

AT this point of the story of Israel, Moses and the rescued tribes have begun their wanderings through the desert. The future is full of difficulty and danger, though it is bright with the confidence of faith. Moses does not doubt but that the ultimate issue must be great good for all associated with the fortunes of Israel. He appeals to Hobab, so near of kin to himself, to share in that great future, to cast in his lot with them. "The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." The blessing will rest on all who belong to Israel. To share in the toil is to share in the reward, and the reward is sure. There is no hesitation in the offer to Hobab. It is plainly for his own good that he should accept it. They are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you; and there is not a shadow of doubt

in the words but that it shall be so. Moses has Hobab's interests at heart when he asks him to accompany them. This is so even if Hobab like Moses himself should never enter the promised land; for he will be in the channel of the promise, under the blessing of God. For *his own sake* he ought to come, "Come thou with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

Hobab's reply was a refusal. Not perhaps because he did not believe in the future of Israel, but simply because he had other interests which seemed good enough for him without any further addition. He had his home and his country, and his own life to which he was accustomed; and he did not care to venture on a new enterprise. He did not specially want the good that Moses promised; he did not feel any special need for further blessing. He was content with his life as it was, and had sufficient interests already. "I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred." The offer did not appeal to him. He did not see it to be anything very special. The prospect did not appear so very promising that he should sacrifice what he had of good. He quite believed that Moses was considering his interests when he invited him to join them; but since he

did not feel great need of the promised good he refused. "I will not go."

But Moses had another plea, even after this distinct refusal, a plea under the circumstances far more powerful to such a man than the offer of personal good. It was the plea not of Hobab's need of Israel, but of Israel's need of Hobab. He knew the country, knew all its dangers and resources: he was a man of great influence and wisdom; and cared for Moses and presumably also for the great religious interests at stake in Israel's future. To have him with them would be a source of strength to all. And so Moses' invitation took another form. He appealed to Hobab's heart and not to his interests: he appealed to their need of him, and no longer to anything of good that might come to himself. "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes." He could be their guide and their guardian, and could be a help to them of untold value. He might be as their very eyes. And we are left to assume that this second appeal was successful.

This twofold argument is the appeal the Church makes to men. It says with assurance, Come with us and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken

good concerning Israel. It says this with emphasis: it says it pleadingly. It has blessings, promises, and powers, of which it is sure. It knows that men are in need of what it possesses. It sees men living to little purpose and for little ends. It sees the sin and the sorrow. It has deep pity for the deep pathos of human life. Its whole work is to do men good, as it declares the gospel of the Kingdom, calling them to pardon and peace, offering them salvation, presenting to them the manifold riches of Christ, pointing to the way of life and of joy. The heart of the true Church yearns over men with a great longing, seeing them to be, though they may know it not, wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. It has a message for you, which it is irreparable loss for you to neglect. It offers you a great and eternal good.

Like Hobab you may think you do not specially need it. You may be quite content with what you have, and may refuse the Church's call because you are concerned about other things which you think enough for you. You have other interests which you imagine are sufficient for life, other ties that bind you to your present lot. You are not oppressed with any sense of need, and treat cavalierly the offer of good. You may even despise the deep anxiety displayed by the Church on your behalf, and may

resent the interference. You are not consciously in want. You are not, for example, overwhelmed by a sense of sin, stained with the guilt of it or burdened with the power of it—and so the offer of forgiveness does not seem very much to you. Salvation seems too far off, a promise of little practical meaning or value. It is not that you deny, or very much doubt, but just that you don't care. If you feel any of the attraction of religion, the invitation is to you only as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for you hear the words—and that is all. You have never felt the all-controlling power, nor seen the all-absorbing vision. You have never been driven to your knees with empty hands and a broken heart, blinded by the very glory of God, and stricken by the shame of your own sin.

Or you have never tasted of failure and the disappointment of hope, and never realised your own weakness, and so are still supported by a sense of self-sufficiency. When the words are uttered in your hearing, "Come with us and we will do thee good," you say, What good? It does not strike you as a very attractive promise. In a kind of unthinking way you probably admit some of the evident features of religion, some of the good that lies on the surface; but you are not deeply enough moved by the promise

to take any novel step. You have your life as it is, and that is good enough for you. Like Hobab you say, "I will not go, but I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred." The Church's first appeal to you to come for your own sake, does not hold you. The things of the soul do not specially interest you and you have refused. In spite of your interest in many things connected with religion, you have not given yourself over to the cause, and bent to the King's Highway of the Holy Cross.

But there is another strand in the cord with which the Church would grapple you. There is another appeal which comes to you, and you cannot shut your ears to it without feeling the sting of cowardly self-contempt. It is the same appeal as Moses made to Hobab when the first failed. He said, Come, if not for your own sake, come for our sake: if you do not need us, we need you: we are to encamp in the wilderness girt round with danger, and weighted with heavy tasks, and you can be to us instead of eyes. If you will not come because the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel, come to help us to achieve that good. "Leave us not, and thou mayest be to us as eyes."

It is a powerful argument to a high heart; and the Church's very existence—encamped in the wilder-

ness, fighting the great battle against principalities and powers of evil, seeking, striving, suffering for that Promised Land, for man's higher life on earth, waiting for the consolation of Israel, giving itself to the great task of establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth—the Church's very existence is an appeal to you. God had spoken good concerning Israel whether Hobab came or stayed; but it was much to have Hobab's help in the great enterprise, much to have one who could be to them instead of eyes. And the Kingdom of Heaven will come with you or without you; but just because it is a task high and hard, you should be in the thick of it, taking your part of the glorious burden. Though you might not think of coming for your own sake, can you resist this other appeal to come for our sake? Some will vibrate to the heroic note, who will be deaf to the sweetest music of invitation. The first appeal might miss some, but is there any to whom the twin appeal should be made in vain? There is a message not merely to the weak, the consciously weak, but also to the strong. The young who have not entered into some of the deepest experiences of religion and who are not yet conscious of need, are still not left out in the appeal. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong."

You may be refusing the appeal of religion because of a narrow and mistaken notion of what the appeal is. It is not simply an appeal to what you half think is the selfish side of your nature, to come that you may receive good, to consider your own soul, to concern yourself merely about your own personal salvation. The Christian salvation is not just salvage, rescuing the flotsam and jetsam, the human wreckage that strews the sea of life; though it is the glory of the faith and its divinest attribute that it does save even the broken and battered lives of men. But salvation includes and implies *service* also. It is a summons to participate in a great work, to share in a glorious venture. Hobab, who refused to go for any possible good to himself, responded to the call for service of others. And though you may not now feel any deep sense of personal need, what have you to say to this claim upon your help? Can you resist the appeal to come to our aid, as we are encamped in the wilderness, beset by peril in the pursuit of a great enterprise? Think of the Church's task in its widest aspect—to claim the world for God, to let them that sit in darkness see the great light, anointed like the Church's Lord to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty them that are bruised. Think of the terrible warfare to which it is committed—to subdue the beast in man, to oppose evil in high places and in low —a warfare that knows no truce, relentless, lifelong; and, as here in this corner of the field we are hard bestead and appeal to you for reënforcement, will you sit at ease and refuse the call?

You do not feel now your need of Christ; though one day you *will;* you too will learn the emptiness of life without spiritual communion; you too will be forced to confess your weakness when heart and flesh fail you; for you as for others there will lurk at some dark corner of the road the inevitable surprise; when the floods go over your head you will cry out of the depths like those who have tasted the desolation of life. But meanwhile the subject is not closed because you think you have no need of Christ. What have you to say to this other appeal—that Christ has need of you? Though you know nothing of the passion of the saints, what about the service of the saints? You are not sure about the supreme claims over your life which Christ makes; but have you no opinion about the great purposes He seeks to accomplish in the world, the high ends He seeks to serve? And as you see Him go to the world's redemption, have you never thrilled to the tacit appeal

to come to the help of the Lord against the mighty? You who may be instead of eyes, can you hold back ingloriously?

> The Son of God goes forth to war,
> A kingly crown to gain;
> His blood-red banner streams afar:—
> Who follows in His train?

Even if Christ's venture for the world be a forlorn hope; even if the fair vision of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth be but a beautiful dream; even if the foe be too strong to be dislodged; aye, even if there be no Promised Land at all (put it as an impossible, an almost unthinkable hypothesis); even if good could never conquer evil, and love triumph over hate; even then it would be the better part for you; it would still be the master-light of all your seeing; and you could not escape the appeal Christ makes to you to stand by His side. This is the heroic note the Lord of the human heart strikes in your heart now; and it would be craven to refuse. "Whoso would serve Me, let him follow Me."

XXIV

THE GIFT OF YOUTH

Let no man despise thy youth.—1 Timothy iv. 12.

The Apostle is instructing Timothy in his behaviour towards the people, how he is to teach and rule and make full proof of his ministry. With the fine fibre and sweet disposition of the young man there seems to have been a constitutional timidity. Of loving and trustful and gentle nature, he had as a defect of his quality an undue distrust of his own judgment, and was inclined to fall back on external authority. He lacked somewhat confidence and courage and the robuster virtues. The Apostle seems to have been anxious lest he should be underrated, as men are apt to underrate a man who lacks confidence. There is a type of youth which is extravagantly assertive, with the sublime conceit of ignorance; but there is another type as common, which is too subservient to the opinions of others, easily discouraged, easily laughed out of opinions, or frightened out of principles, too diffident to let it be thought that he has convictions and

principles from which he will not be moved. The writer seemed to have in mind Timothy's special temptation in this respect to timidity, and seeks to inspire him with the necessary confidence and self-respect and the authority which his work needs and should give. "Let no man despise thy youth."

It is a double-barrelled charge, to the people to respect him for his office, not to let any prejudice hinder his influence, and not to depreciate his work because of his youth; and to himself also to give him a touch of independence, to brace him up to his high task, to make him assume the authority of truth and command the respect of the people. But the way he is to command this respect is not by insisting on the authority of his office, not by arrogance of manner, or any sort of self-assertion, but by making his influence so true and potent that all will be compelled to acknowledge his claims as a teacher. The authority which depends merely on an office, on a fact of external position, on what we call "the cloth" speaking of the clergy, is a very poor sort of authority at the best. It is moral influence to which the Apostle here points. To gain and hold real respect Timothy is to make himself an example. He is to win his place of authority by his character, and faith, and zeal, and determination, and good works. "Let

no man despise thy youth; but be thou an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity." His Christian character and Christian conduct are to impress themselves so persuasively that men will forget the things that might prejudice them against his message, will forget that he is young.

It is not always easy for men to forget that another who assumes the right to teach, or who advances anything original, or who is zealous over some reform, is young. The words which Dr. Johnson put into the mouth of Pitt as defending himself against "the atrocious crime of being a young man," describe the situation for many another besides Pitt. There is a common despising of youth, especially in the region of opinion, as if wisdom could only be, and must always be, on the side of experience. The despising may be done with a look which says plainly "You are very young," as the supreme and clenching argument, or which says in the presence of enthusiasm and fervid zeal, "When you are old you will take things more calmly." That is too true, and indeed it constitutes the great and magnificent quality of youth that it can glow and blaze. It is a very commonplace thought after all that when men are old they will take things more calmly, meaning only

that the fires will have burned low. Cynicism is a poor exchange for enthusiasm. There are many and manifest temptations of youth, such as rashness, both of judgment and of conduct, hotheadedness, passion, unbalanced zeal, but these are all the extravagances of what is its finest quality. The world needs the strong hopefulness and buoyancy of youth, as well as the large experience and cautious wisdom of age. Youth is the motive power of the world, driving it to new ends, and bringing to it new hopes.

Only the foolish despise youth: only the foolish look down upon it and seek ever to cramp and stifle it; though few even of the wise estimate aright the glorious gift of youth. Poets and romancers sing the praises of youth, but often only for its capacity of joy, as a wonderful time of abounding energy and fresh optimism, a time of joy and hope and strength. Older men will sometimes envy youth because of this, not for its opportunity, but for its capacity for enjoyment. Even for that it is not to be despised. The pleasures of health and strength, the first delight in the world of nature; the pleasures of friendship, meeting in the fresh glow of loyal feeling without suspicion, without self-interest, without considering motives, without thought of anything but sympathy, and kindness, and goodwill; the pleasures of

acquiring knowledge, of finding new intellectual interests; the pleasures of beginning work, of entering on a definite pursuit; the pleasures of acknowledging greatness in others, ungrudgingly admiring and loving some without thought of jealousy or envy or meanness—all these and others have surely been the portion in some degree of all who remember their youth.

I put it that way retrospectively because we do not recognise what a great gift youth is till we have lost it, or at least till it has lost its first zest. It is on looking back on it that we see how blessed it is or might have been. When we are in it we cannot estimate its full value. Thus youth is inclined to look to the future for its great moments, going on in imagination to some distant time for the best things, except in the season of absolute gaiety and lighthearted happiness with the present. On looking back we see what usually was forgotten, namely, not only the great gift youth is, but also the great responsibility, the wonderful opportunity of that wonderful time of joy and hope. Thus, far worse than letting men despise thy youth is it to despise your own youth; and that can be easily done by neglecting the opportunities which make it the most solemn as well as the gladdest time of life. What ways youth has of

despising itself and giving excuse for others to despise it also! To take this great gift thoughtlessly and selfishly merely as a gift with no thought of it as an opportunity, to accept the privilege with no sense of responsibility, is really to despise it and to make it also despicable. To look upon it merely as a time of enjoyment and never as a time of preparation, to take the springtime as a season of happiness and never as a season of sowing—that is to throw away the boon and despise it as worthless. No contempt of others can equal that self-contempt.

The first great temptation of youth is the reckless prodigality of itself. In youth we look upon health as measureless, and time as boundless, and our opportunities as limitless. We do not look upon life as a whole, the future of which will be conditioned by how we treat the present. Many a man afterwards has to lament the waste of his powers, and all his life long has to combat habits acquired thoughtlessly, or has to toil terribly to make up for lost time. What stores of enthusiasm and energy and moral passion are lost to the world because youth despises its best gifts, and squanders its powers in gay unconcern. If we do not learn self-control and industry and discipline of body and mind then, when can we do it? The loss to the world's best life is

terrible, to say nothing of the loss to ourselves who might have been so different. It is right and natural to look upon the dawn of life as a time of happiness, to take youth as a blessed gift of joy and hope and strength; but to take it merely as an occasion for personal pleasure is infamy, a wrong to the world as well as an insult to God. Enjoyment may be the first word about youth, but the last word is *judgment;* and that should make it solemn as well as glad. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Let no man despise thy youth—least of all, let no man, by self-indulgence, by weak surrender to dominant impulse, make his own youth despicable.

There is a more subtle way still of youth despising itself than the common, careless indifference, or the reckless prodigality which are its besetting temptations. It is by belittling its real greatness, by being half-ashamed of its high thoughts and noble passions and generous impulses. This self-pitying shame comes when the spirit of the world is allowed to play on us undisturbed. That spirit suggests that enthusiasm, and ardour, and high ideals are rather

laughable things, at which every sensible man of the world smiles. These splendid visions are impracticable, the fruit of ignorance. When we are older we will know better and will accommodate ourselves to the hard facts of life. Older people often despise their youth by sneering at their past earnestness, and rather pride themselves on having at last learned prudence and worldly interest, on knowing on what side their bread is buttered, and generally on being at last comfortably down on the common level in practice and custom and ways of thinking. What pitiful apostasies there have been! The fires are damped down pretty low, when a man despises himself for once having seen the vision and once followed the gleam, when a man despises the time when his heart flamed at some great injustice, or his eye kindled with some great hope, or his life was given to some great service, and his soul trembled to the touch of the adorable Christ who gave it the vision splendid. Would the world and the Church be as they are today if there had been no apostates, no Judas to sell the Master for pieces of silver?

We bless God for the old men who dream dreams, who once as young men saw visions, for those who have kept their youth, evergreen in faith, and hope, and love. Listen to them, and not to the *blasé* world-

ling whose heart is eaten out and whose dull eyes cannot see the shining of the glory. Believe in the ideal, for in that lies the hope of the world. Follow the gleam, as such an one when he was old sang it out to cheer and encourage his younger brethren to keep their visions and be faithful to their ideals—

There on the border
Of boundless ocean
And all but in Heaven
Hovers the gleam.

Not of the sunlight,
Not of the moonlight,
Not of the starlight!

O young mariner,
Down to the haven.
Call your companions,
Launch your vessel,
And crowd your canvas.
And ere it vanishes
Over the margin,
After it, follow it,
Follow the gleam.

The world and the Church look to the young for the visions that keep us from sordid acquiescence in the commonplace and the accepted. It is an irreparable loss to both when these visions fail, when youth becomes prosaic and unaspiring, when the ideal loses its currency among us, when the young cease to picture the perfect state both for self and for

society. It always means a relaxing of the vital hold of religion over the community. It is the dying out of faith in God. One of the main functions of religion is to keep before us the ideal; and the young who see visions are a natural channel of its working. Despise not your youth in this its best aspect. Keep your visions: nurse them: correct them by the mind of Christ. As He knocks at the door of your heart, offering you not merely a state of blessedness, but a *career of service,* open to Him willingly. He will inspire passion in you, and will regulate it; and will set you to your work in the world for Him and for the brethren. He will give you a vocation which will fill your life, and will save it from gross temptations and redeem it from many evils. The heart that has seen the vision will never be satisfied with lower loves. The hand that has felt the touch of His finger will not move to evil ends. Bend to Him, responsive to His love, eager for His great service; and even when you become old you will dream dreams of beauty and peace; and you, young men, will see visions of purity and joy, and noble life that will change the world. Let no man despise the youth which has in it such powers and potencies.

XXV

THE IMMORTALITY OF MEMORY

The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.—PROVERBS x. 7.

IN the varied strands that make up human motive this one is not the least powerful. It is a common and a natural desire of men to leave a good name behind them. It is a pain to think of anything hereafter smirching their fair reputation when they can no longer speak for themselves. And at the last it has been a comfort to many a man to think that he has left his name untarnished, with no disgrace attached to it. When we think of it, it seems a strange thing that men should be so concerned about posthumous reputation. It seems due to an instinctive faith in immortality, a stubborn belief in the persistence of personality. It is more than an extension of the ordinary human foible to be thought well of by friends and neighbours. It is a kind of feeling that what a man is and was and did goes with him past the gates of death, that there is no real break in the continuity of his life, and his character on earth remains as the

great asset with which he stands at the bar of the great future. In any case this desire to leave an honourable memory and an unblemished reputation influences all men who think of the future at all. On the whole it is a noble motive, and has helped among other nobler motives to produce many a heroic life. Perhaps in all of us it has had some moral effect if only as a deterrent.

It is also part of the same motive which induces the strong desire for posthumous fame. We see this often displayed in the lives of artists and literary men and statesmen. The ordinary man in all these branches is as a rule content if he can gain some hold on his own generation; but the greatest men have always an ideal audience and an ideal constituency to which they appeal. It is the judgment of posterity, which is supposed to be calmer and more dispassioned, with the coarser ingredients filtered out through the years. The poet or artist who is sure of himself and of his art is thus not too much disturbed by contemporary neglect, or when mediocrity makes its clamorous bid for popular favour. He appeals from Philip drunk to Philip sober; he appeals from present prejudice to a wider and calmer tribunal. Even in practical life a man has often been supported by the thought that though at present mis-

understood and looked askance at, he will in later times have credit for good motives and upright action. And sometimes when a man is conscious that he has soiled his reputation by some weakness he thinks that in a complete review of all he has attempted and achieved he will be more tenderly judged, or at least his best work will be rightly valued in spite of his faults. There is a pathetic sentence in Lord Bacon's will which suggests this, "For my name and memory I leave it to men's charitable speeches, to foreign nations, and to the next ages." Bacon knew well that he had ruined his reputation as a public man and needed the charitable judgment of his contemporaries, but he also felt that his great work done for human learning would receive its meed of honour, especially when the circumstances of his fall did not loom so large in men's minds, "in foreign nations and the next ages." The desire for posthumous fame or at least to leave an honourable memory to all whom it concerns is thus a very strong motive and a legitimate one in moral action.

In moments of doubt we may say, What does it matter what men think of us when we are off the scene? or in moments of cynicism we may say that none of us is much missed, and few if any will remem-

ber us long, and the kind of memory we bequeath is of little account; but these are only fleeting moods, and the original motive comes back in all its force. Hamlet's cynical remark was forced from him by his own keen memory of his father, "O heavens! die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year," though he thinks he must build churches even to attain that immortality; but it was Hamlet's own regard for his father's reputation and his own loving memory of his father which made him cynical. We know that we will be remembered by some, and that the kind of memory they have of us will mean much to them, and so it means much to us.

We know, too, that the things that really count in that memory are the things of character. In our final judgment of men the principle of judgment is that of our text, "The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot." It is the statement of a fact that the ultimate standard of judgment among men is a *moral* one. Death clears off all adventitious and accidental details, clarifies vision, and shows us the essential things in a man's life. When our judgment is so purified by the fact of death our standard becomes not capacity but character. We find ourselves classifying according to

the old division of good and evil. Reputation in the general estimate of the world takes on a moral colouring. Instinctively we feel that that is the only thing that really counts. Other things drop off and pass out of sight. We begin to look at things from the standpoint of eternity, with something of the eyes of God. Things take a different perspective. Some of the things that counted most fall into the background and the simple qualities of moral character stand in their natural precedence. The memory of a good man is blessed; the memory of a bad man is infamy. This is a true rule of history and experience, though we may think we can point to some exceptions; and there are against the rule the classical lines which Shakespeare makes Antony say of Julius Cæsar,

> The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones.

Shakespeare puts the words into the mouth of a schemer, a man who is playing on the passions of the crowd. On the whole the opposite of Antony's words is true, the good of a man's life does not die, and certainly it is only for the good in it that we ever bless him.

The promise of our text is that men will remember

a good man and find in the memory a softening, sweetening, inspiring influence. The memory of the just is blessed—it makes men bless the memory with proud grateful recollection—and the memory blesses those who remember, makes them rise to a higher level of aspiration and endeavour. There is a true immortality of memory, not the external sort in which a name reverberates through the ages held in reverence and recollection by men on earth for ever—that sort of immortality is impossible to many, if indeed to any at all in any complete sense. The renown of the greatest poet or artist or statesman or warrior is but a shadowy thing at the best, to most only a name signifying nothing. New immortals take their place and also pass away to the shadowy realm. The pale ghosts elbow each other out; and life goes on serenely with its own joys and sorrows and hopes and needs. There is no immortality of fame. Here and there a student revives a reputation for a dead author, or statesman, or king; but there are ever new candidates for the seats of the immortals, new brows for the laurel wreaths, new hands for the sceptre of power. There is not even any sure principle by which the remembered names are chosen: one is remembered for good and another for evil, one for his wisdom and another for his folly. "The iniquity of

oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy," says Sir Thomas Browne in his quaint and learned *Urn Burial,* " and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana, he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal durations, and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon. Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? " It is a bloodless dream after all to think of handing down one's name to countless generations of men. Cowley's lines have stirred the blood in many an ambitious youth,

> What can I do to be for ever known,
> And make the age to come my own?

But if there be nothing but this hopeless and shadowy immortality of memory to look to, then the cynical words of Ecclesiastes are true, " A living dog is better than a dead lion; for the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten."

But even in this region of memory, though there is no real immortality of fame, there is a real immortality of influence. Here again we are brought back to the fact that the ultimate standard of judgment is a moral one, that both the good and the evil men do live after them, the good for a blessing to all the world, the evil for a curse. The true and only permanent contribution men can make to the world is that they have advanced the cause of the highest; and the one condemnation is if they have hindered that cause. When a life is resolved to its elements, these elements are moral in the widest sense; and the life comes absolutely within the scope of the great principle of our text that "the memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked is a curse." This is the mystical communion of the saints, a very real thing in the Church's faith, even although few of the saints be known by name. They minister to the life of the Church, and are still, even as they were, the very salt of the earth.

We can get an easy point of contact with this great thought by thinking of the saints we ourselves have known and perhaps loved and lost. We realise the truth of the benediction of our text; for we have happy memories of some blessed dead who lived uprightly in God's faith and fear. They have entered

into an immortality of memory within us and of moral influence that can have no end while the world lasts. Thus the memory of the just is an inspiration as well as a happiness. It is a real aid to faith, perhaps the best aid we have ever had or can have; for religion is life not creed, and only life can beget life. They of blessed memory help us; for they make it easy for us to believe in goodness and God and eternal life and heaven. They are even our last strand in the evidence for personal immortality; for we cannot believe that all that power of loving and all that wealth of grace and all that beauty of character have ceased. He lives a poor attenuated life who has never thrilled to the mystic union, who does not know that

> There are two societies alone on earth;
> The noble living and the noble dead.

And sometimes even we see that they are not two but one great society, the one irrefragable bond of souls, the one Communion of the saints. The memory of the just is blessed, a blessing to us more than we can put into words, not only in stimulating us to emulation, not only exciting us and guiding us to all good, but also establishing us in faith in good and faith that we too have the same great vocation, to which we are called to walk worthy.

Many churches do not keep the so-called Saints' Days, having some well-grounded fears of the superstition and false worship to which such celebrations tend to minister; but there is one day in the Christian year we might well keep, and that is All Saints' Day, when we reverently think of the blessed memory of the just, when we celebrate the triumphs of faith and trophies of grace, and remember the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs, the holy Church throughout all the world, the whole family in heaven and earth, named after the name of Jesus, all the endeavours after pure faith and holy living of the humble and true-hearted followers of Christ. It would not be just an empty celebration, doing idle homage to the great lives of departed saints. It might be a mighty inspiration for more heroism of faith and life. There is inspiration in the thought that we are not alone in our fitful endeavours, but that we come in a great succession and are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. It is a source of strength to know that we are not exceptional in our struggle, or sorrow, or joy; that we, if we are faithful, are treading where the saints have trod; that we belong to the ageless Church, and take our place among those who have fought the

good fight and witnessed the good confession, inspired by the blessed memory of the just. With all our petty divisions and small distinctions, it is something to realise the unity of the spirit, and be held in the bonds of peace and love.

And what higher ambition can there be for us than to be counted also among those whose memory smells sweet, who have helped not hindered the world in its steep ascent to God? What nobler part to play than be a link, however humble, in that golden chain of testimony which binds the ages together? We all know in some form the truth of the other proverb, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." That is true even in a worldly sense, but the inheritance of good is not confined to such natural descent. It is part of the life of everything that lives. It is part of the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. All personal ambitions dwindle before the majesty of this desire to partake of the true posthumous fame, the true immortality of memory, to partake of the very influence of Christ, and be blessed with the memory of the just. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

XXVI

PAST AND PRESENT

Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.—Ecclesiastes vii. 10.

The actual connection of these words of our text is quite in keeping with the tone and temper of the writer of this Book. He does not mean, at least as the chief purpose of this rebuke, to glorify the present with its opportunities and possibilities at the expense of the past. It would hardly be in accordance with the prevailing pessimism of the writer to strike here a hopeful and inspiring note. He is sick with life, and out of tune with the airy hopes of youth and its golden dream that the world is a fairer, sweeter place than it was in bygone days. We would not expect this bright, cheerful philosophy from the man whose verdict on all earthly things is Vanity of vanities; and we do not get it. The whole trend of his teaching is that life is illusive, and a man should not build his hopes too high, and look for permanence in any source of joy. Rather he advises moderation,

to take things calmly, and make the most of life. To be over-sanguine is to court disappointment: to be over-righteous is to destroy happiness: to be over-evil is to be broken by inexorable law. Moderation is the great secret.

So here, he deprecates anger, and hastiness of spirit. It is foolish to be angry, and patience is better than pride. Seneca said, "Anger is like rain: it breaks itself on what it falls." All worldly wisdom preaches this, whatever it practises. You don't do any good and you only hurt yourself by losing your temper and getting over-excited about anything. It is a mark of folly to be hasty of spirit: "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Even to be angry about symptoms of the present and by comparison magnify the past, and ask petulantly, what is the cause that the former days were better than these? the wise man will not do that. "Thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." The wise man of this creed takes things as they are, and does not fret himself with repining about good times gone, and with discontent about the present, and gloomy views about the future. He makes the most of what cannot be helped. He cultivates a cheerful pleasant temperament. Not that he deceives himself with utopian dreams that the world is improving and will soon be

a paradise—he only just wants peace to enjoy what good there is, and won't let the present be lost by a barren worship of the past. The truth of this attitude (what truth there is in it), and the danger of it, are both too obvious for us to spend time enlarging on them. But we can see how, from this standpoint of somewhat cynical worldly-wisdom, the writer should exclaim, "Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?"

In any case, for higher and larger reasons than the writer's, the advice is good, and is applicable to us; for it touches on a temptation which robs life of its full power. It is a common infirmity of old age, but it is not confined to age, to disparage the present and to glorify the past. Especially in times of trial this is so: when the present is a wail it is natural to think that the past was a hallelujah. In reviewing times that are gone memory has a hallowing, softening power. It is a merciful provision of our nature which makes us forget the pains and sorrows of the past, and when we do remember them sets them in a soft and tender light, letting us see some of the good which has come from them. And as the sorrows of the past seem diminished by distance, by a strange reversion the joys loom larger and finer. To a reflective mind the pleasures of memory are sweeter

than the pleasures of possession, or even the pleasures of anticipation. Of course it is largely a matter of temperament, but this must be the experience of many. In looking back on a journey we forget the many discomforts and little annoyances which marred perfect pleasure, or if we remember them it is to laugh at them and see the humorous side they had; and fond memory glorifies the great sights enjoyed. I am quite sure that the Matterhorn was not to me as grand, or Florence as fair, as I now picture them; and am content to have it so. With the journey of our life the same is true. We paint our pictures with what perspective we please, and put ungainly things far in the background, or leave them out altogether. We look at the sorrows of the past through an inverted telescope which sends them further away and diminishes their size: we look at the joys through the magnifying end.

And this tendency seen in our everyday life is also reflected on a larger scale in history. All old institutions gain allies for their continued existence in sentiment, and respect for what has displayed the quality of permanence. We judge of the past by what has come down to us of the past; and make unfavourable comparison of the present with it. We imagine all ancient architecture to be as the relics

that survive in magnificent cathedrals and abbeys and castles. We think of them all as belonging to the same period; and in our comparisons contrast the present point of time practically with all time. We forget among other things the greatly extended sphere for human activity now; and we forget that with the treasures of the past which we possess time has weeded out much that was inferior. In art and literature, as well as in architecture, the same unfair comparison is unconsciously made between what is produced now and what has been produced throughout all the ages. We ask almost indignantly where we have a philosopher like Aristotle, a poet like Homer, a dramatist like Shakespeare, a scientist like Newton, an artist like Raphael, a sculptor like Michael Angelo; forgetting that you can hardly get another from all history to make a pair with any one of these. To be quite just, before you can say that the former times were better than these, you must fix on one particular time, and you must take the whole of it, every branch of knowledge, every sphere of activity, every condition of life; and then, if you can, you must draw your completed contrast.

If by the former time you mean some earlier period of your own life, are you taking into account all the facts, and not allowing prejudice or the nar-

rowing vision of age to make your judgment jaundiced? It is a natural bias of the mind as we have seen, and in many respects a very beautiful thing, to glorify the past. The danger of it comes in when it makes light of the present, and destroys the healthful faith that would save the present from despair. When a lady complained to Mr. E. J. Milliken, long one of the most brilliant of the staff of *Punch*—as people have ever complained since the first number I suppose—that *Punch* is not so good as it used to be; "No," assented Milliken, "it never was." To be a praiser of the past is often not only a harmless thing, but even it may be a great inspiration to high endeavour; for a nation for example to keep in mind some heroic period of their history when great deeds were done and great ideals prevailed; for poor, broken, oppressed Italy of Garibaldi's day to dream of Rome and her great Empire, for the Swiss to remember their stern struggles for freedom, for England to point back to the days of good Queen Bess when the Spaniard was beaten back, and the bounds of knowledge were widened. All this is good if it be used as an inspiration to fire generous ardour. But we must not let the past sit on us like an old man of the sea, choking us and fettering our movements. It is for this stupid purpose that the

past is generally used by the ordinary *laudator temporis acti*. The underlying idea is anything that now can be done must be feeble and not worth doing. Such an idea kills effort and robs life of dignity. It paralyses the present and mutilates the future. In this sense it is a word apt and opportune, "Say not, the former days were better than these."

On the one hand we have ever with us the man whose attitude to life is summed up in the dictum, Whatever is is right, who opposes change of all sorts, and is quite content with the actual state of affairs. On the other hand some adopt the opposite, and equally false, statement as a motto, Whatever is is wrong. Strange though it may appear, the two positions may be the fruit of the selfsame spirit, and have their origin in the same point of view. In their essence they have both their cause in want of faith. The man who is content with the present does not see that it exists to be carried forward into a nobler future; and the man who disparages the present and glorifies the past does not see that the very same causes are at work, that the present is really the outcome and fruition of the past which he praises, and if he be right the poverty of the present stultifies the past he loves. And both attitudes, that of the un-

reasoning conservative who will not look forward, and that of the sentimental mediævalist who will only look back, deprive us of the hope and vigour to make our days true and noble. Things cannot be let alone. They will change in any case, and by themselves will change for the worse. Time changes things with your will or in spite of it. Things become the worse for wear; and no achievements of the past can take from us the task of to-day. "Time is the great innovator," says Bacon, "and if time *of course* alter things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end?" It is a pertinent question to put to those who would tie our hands by senile idolatry of the past, or make us mark time in puerile complacency with the present.

In the days when men were fonder of abstract discussions than they are now, there used to be a great controversy among philosophers and theologians as to whether it was true to speak of the perfectibility or the corruptibility of human nature. In the one case it was held that the race tended towards progress, a stately and regular march of mind: in the other case that the race tended to settle and sink. I would hold a brief for neither. Neither is true, and both may be true. It all depends on the forces that

are brought to bear on life. Life is ductible, elastic, and takes shape according to the forces that act on it. To have the manly, hopeful attitude that I would commend to you instead of the despairing one of our text, we do not need to believe in the perfectibility of the race: we only need to believe in its improvability under the right conditions. It does not mean the cheap optimism, the easy-going faith that things must go on somehow all right, that all is for the best, and every change is progress. When we know the facts of history and the facts of life we are kept from braggart comparisons between ourselves and our fathers. We see cycles of degeneracy, periods of barrenness, times when good seems vanished out of the earth. We see that there is no innate principle in the world raising it ever higher without effort or hindrance. We see that progress has to be bought by blood. We see that every gain of the past has to be acquired at great price, and has to be kept at the point of the sword. The shallow rose-coloured views about perfectibility, so common in the writers at the period of the French Revolution, are false, even though to-day these views are expressed in scientific dress, under names like evolution and such-like. It does not follow that our days are better than former days. Say not that. Thou dost not speak

wisely concerning this. You must show that it is so by larger thought and grander build of character and nobler life.

But our days *are* better than former days in this, that we have greater opportunities, to us have come the wisdom of the ancients, the ripe fruit of experience, advantages of knowledge, wider outlets for every gift. All this will be none avail if we lose faith. We cannot lose faith in God, and keep faith in ourselves and our future. Without faith we have no sure guarantee that will make effort purposeful, and we will sigh for a mythical golden age lying behind us as a race. The golden age is before us if God leads us on. We prepare for the coming of His Kingdom when we make His will ours, and serve His ends, in which are bound up the true end of man. With such faith we need not look back upon former days longingly, upheld in our own day by the thought of God's presence. We face our own task, and take up our own burden with hope and self-respect. Said Molière, "The ancients are the ancients; and we are the people of to-day." We need a manly faith in our own destiny, the faith that God has a place and a purpose for us—even us the people of to-day, as He had for the ancients.

Christ is to us the pledge of that, and the promise

of it. In the faith of Him we take large views in space and in time.

Say not the struggle nought availeth,
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem *here* no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.
And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward look, the land is bright.

XXVII

THE PRINCIPLE OF JUDGMENT

I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.—JEREMIAH vi. 19.

To the prophets punishment was never a mere misfortune, an adventitious thing that came to some and missed others as by chance, some hard lot that befell a certain number who did not have the luck to escape, as falling stones strike individuals of a crowd by haphazard. It had an essential relation to life, the result of cause and effect as universal as physical law. It was not fortune; it was fate. Not fate in the sense of a blind, resistless, remorseless force; but the result of purpose, reason, law. They traced everything past the external appearance to the inward moral source, which alone gives consistence and true meaning to human life. They, no more than modern science, could conceive of anything as *causeless*. But they were not content to find out secondary causes and rest there. They saw the will of God as the inspiring force of nature, the

hand of God shaping history, the law of God ruling all life.

Jeremiah pronounces judgment in the name of God, and points to outraged law, to wicked deeds, to disregard of the moral conditions which alone make life possible. He speaks with certitude as of a man who sees into the sources of things and will not abate his warning because the appearance at the time seems to give the lie to his fears. The rulers of the people took roseate views of the situation, and said, "Peace, peace," deceiving their own hearts and the hearts of others with pleasant dreams that all was well, and lulled themselves into a sense of security. Jeremiah saw that there could be no peace on such conditions. It was a frivolous age, when men thought to silence the thunder by shutting their ears; and when God's watchmen said, "Hearken to the sound of the trumpet," the trumpet that presages doom, they said, "We will not hearken." To people in such a frivolous mood punishment when it came would be looked on as calamity: they would think themselves the sport of cruel fortune. Where the prophet saw law, they would only see chance: where the prophet saw cause, they would only see accident. So, he strives to enlighten them and convince them that God's judgment was based on prin-

ciple, the harvest of the seed sown. "Hear, O heaven: behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts."

This inevitable consequence of cause and effect is the basis of all prophetic writing, and rewards and punishments are regarded as the product of the actual state of moral life. From the outside standpoint judgment is the result of conduct: from the inner standpoint it is the result of character. Conduct is character unfolding itself; and character is the way a man thinks. From the one standpoint judgment is the fruit of men's deeds; from the other it is the fruit of their thoughts. Isaiah puts the same message thus:—"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him." Jeremiah's statement is the same, only carried a little deeper to its source. Our destiny is the fruit of our doings and the reward of our hands; and our doing is the fruit of our thoughts. The common feature of both messages is that judgment is not something superimposed on life, a sentence arbitrarily passed on a man. Punishment is not retribution exacted from a man by a superior power outside him; it is the necessary and inevitable con-

sequence flowing from the condition. You see what a keen and deep diagnosis the prophet makes when he defines the impending national punishment as the fruit of their thoughts.

It is the fashion to speak of thoughts as of little importance in the review of a life. The opinions a man has, the creed he holds, the way he looks at things, the colour and bent of his mind, these are supposed to count for very little in determining religious value. Morality is made the standard of religion; and morality is taken to be the things a man does, and the things he refrains from doing. That is a very outside and wooden way of defining morality. The spiritual test of an act is its motive. There may be right acts with wrong motives: there may be even wrong acts with right motives. Robert Burns was a much better theologian and a better moralist, when he said,

> The heart's aye,
> The part aye,
> That mak's us right or wrang.

Legality is not always equity for the simple reason that except in special cases it is not possible to make sure of motives, and so the law has to content itself with acts. But we know from experience how the best-intentioned man will sometimes blunder into

mistakes; and we also know that many an irreproachable deed may be damned by the cunning or deceit or crooked purpose at the bottom of it.

Christ's teaching was full of this inwardness of aspect. As opposed to the formalists, who had buried the spirit under a mass of outward observances and made the law of none effect by their traditions, He showed that men were judged by the attitude of their hearts. It was held that if a man did not kill he was guiltless of breaking the commandment: but the Master taught that if hate was harboured in the mind the sin of murder was committed. With impeccable and respectable conduct, He showed that there could be adultery committed in the heart. Sinful deeds there were in plenty, but the root of the sin lay in the corrupted will, the depraved heart, the evil thought. Defilement did not mean the omission to perform any of the idle ceremonies, of which the Pharisees made so much: but out of a defiled heart came the things that defiled the man. We judge by the eye, by our common rough-and-ready standards, and from our limitations it cannot be otherwise to some extent; but God's judgment is not so limited. It is the fruit of our thoughts.

Again, it must be remembered that in the long run as we think so will we act. Thoughts issue in

speech and in deeds. The whole stream of life is coloured by the colour of the source. The bent of a man's mind is the bent of his life. The way he looks at God and the world and life must determine his every act. Our Lord's statement is a general statement of fact, that "a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." There never was a more absurd and inept idea than the common one that it does not matter much what a man thinks and believes. By comparison nothing else matters. It is true that a man may hold certain opinions and speculations in a loose fashion without these affecting his life; but that is because these opinions are not his true creed. They are really outside his mind. If they entered into the fibre and tissue of his thinking they would represent the exact man. We speak of convictions when we only mean vague impressions: we speak of creed when we only mean surface views taken on trust floating lightly on what we call our minds. But below the stream of what we show to the world there flows strong and deep the current of what we really think and believe: and that is the measure of the man.

For example, it is the accepted cant of the day that

a man can hold any views he likes about God and human life (or for that part no views at all) without making much difference. It is the most imbecile of all popular fallacies. The character of your God will be your own character. What you really believe about the government of the world regulates your whole conduct. Will it make no difference whether you think life to be a medley of chance, or the ordered march of wise and loving purpose? Will it make no difference whether you look upon the supreme ruler of the universe as blind to moral issues, or as an unjust judge, or as a hard man who gathers where he hath not strawed, or as just and holy and merciful? Will it make no difference whether He is to you the Despot of heaven or the Heavenly Father? That is if you *really* believe? Instead of creed being of no importance, it is all-important: instead of your thoughts not counting, nothing else counts. As a man thinketh in his heart so is he—that, no more and no less. Your life is the fruit of your thoughts.

We are tempted to miss the inwardness of life and religion, and so have shallow views of sin and punishment and redemption. Sin is not merely mistake, the neglect to observe certain rules. It is a spiritual thing, and its roots go deep, past flesh and blood down to the very fountain of life. Sin is the

mother of sins; and that is why redemption cannot come by any process of pruning and cutting. Sin is the foul creature from which springs the hateful brood which we call sins; and her nest is in the heart. So repentance is made the gate to life because it touches the source. It means a sorrow that turns the heart from its old loves and lusts, and gives the life a new direction. It means a change of route and thus a change of destination. It means the bringing forth of new fruit, the fruit of our new thoughts. When will we learn, therefore, that judgment is not arbitrary or incidental or capricious? It is self-registering, automatic, the harvest of our life. Conduct we have seen is the outgrowth of character; and character conditions destiny. To this people—to all people God brings the fruit of their thoughts. It is your reward or your punishment; your heaven or your hell. No change of lot, no alteration of outward condition, can make essential difference. "What matter where," asks Milton's Satan, "if I be still the same?"

The wages of being good is not some recompense added on like a perquisite to a salary. Its highest wages is goodness itself. The recompense of being holy is holiness: the reward of being pure is purity. The punishment of sin is itself, its own loathly

deathly self. The harvest of the flesh is itself, corruption. The penalty of a depraved mind is depravity. The retribution of an impure heart is impurity. Who will deliver you from the body of that death? "I will bring upon this people the fruit of their thoughts." Well might the Proverb say with wistful solemnity, "My son, keep thine heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Who is sufficient for these things? Who can guard his thoughts and keep a watch, a sleepless watch at the citadel of life? There is no safety for a man except by giving up his heart to the keeping of a stronger than himself, submitting his thoughts to the very thought of God, yielding his will to be conformed to the will of God, making surrender of his whole being till he is truly God-possessed, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. It is a process, including the whole work, the life-long work of sanctification; but it begins as an act of will, an act of faith, opening the door of the heart to the gracious Master who stands knocking for entrance. Where He has possession there is no room for any kind of evil. It cannot live in His presence. Evil lives with us because we have not made full surrender of ourselves to Him. We know in fragmentary form how it is possible for one man to dominate

another by his personality, till the other thinks his thought, speaks his words, performs his will. So, it is possible to willingly let Christ dominate our every power that the same mind as was in Him is in us, His very way of looking at things is our way, His life is our life. That is the Christian ideal and the Christian task to have Christ formed in us. If He were, could there be for us a fearful looking forward to of judgment? If His pure thoughts were our thoughts, could we ever be afraid to see the fruit of our thoughts?

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